

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

14 OCTOBER 2019

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

Present:

Councillor Shane Moore (In the Chair)

Councillors: Christopher Akers-Belcher, Paddy Brown, Jim Lindridge, Sue Little, Ann Marshall, Leisa Smith, John Tennant, and Mike Young.

Also Present: Edwin Jeffries, HJTUC

Officers: 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
Steve Hilton, Communications and Marketing Team
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

47. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Dave Hunter.

48. Declarations of Interest

None.

49. Minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2019

Received.

50. Minutes of the meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board held on 1 July 2019

Received.

51. Local Council Tax Support 2020/21 *(Director of Finance and Policy)*

Type of decision

Budget and Policy Framework Decision.

Purpose of report

The report updated 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 and set out a proposed LCTS scheme for 2020/21.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Finance and Customer Services outlined the background to the operation of the Council's 12% LCTS scheme which had been in place since 2014/15. The numbers of claimants in Hartlepool had decreased since June 2013 and in addition to 5000 pensioner households (a protected group under LCTS) there were around 8700 working age households in the town in receipt of this benefit. Collection of council tax from these households was more difficult but collection rates remained positive.

In determining the LCTS scheme for 2020/21, Members would need to agree a scheme that was financially viable and balanced providing sustainability in future year's schemes. Updated financial monitoring showed the retention of a 12% scheme would be sustainable. A LCTS Risk Reserve had been previously 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 was proposed to maintain this reserve at £0.3m to manage any in-year financial risks that may emerge.

The report recommended the continuation of the 12% scheme and it was highlighted that any alternative to the 12% scheme would need to be the subject of public consultation for a period of six weeks and therefore Members would need to make a decision on a potential alternative at this meeting to allow sufficient time for the consultation to be undertaken ahead of the statutory requirement to have the LCTS scheme in place and approved by Council before the end of the calendar year.

Members raised issues around the cut in the central government grant for administering the LCTS scheme, the LCTS Risk Reserve and collection of council tax debts payable under the scheme. The Assistant Director stated that the reserve would cover any 'shocks' to the system should the number of claimants suddenly rise, for example. Collection rates were good even though they were often limited by the DWP maximum attachment to benefits level of £3.70 per week. The cuts in the administration grant for

the scheme had been managed within the department through non-filling of vacancies and fixed term appointments. In terms of the management of the service, it was noted that there were already a number of vacancies in the service. Members discussed alternative options for the LCTS scheme for 2020/21 and the impact on the budget and overall Council Tax level.

The Director of Finance and Policy indicated that, as detailed in the report, the maximum recurring additional income from implementing a 20% scheme is £569,000. Additionally, the Director indicated that using the one of LCTS Risk Reserve would only provide one off funding and defer a budget deficit of £300,000 to 2021/22. It would also mean the Council had no funding to manage in-year increases in LCTS demand. The adverse impact of higher LCTS cuts would lead an increase in the number of 'stacked' Attachment of Benefits and the resulting risk of higher levels of irrecoverable Council Tax was also highlighted.

It was proposed and seconded that public consultation be undertaken on a LCTS Scheme of 12%, 14%, 16%, 18% and 20%.

Decision

1. That the future financial and administrative risks associated with the Local Council Tax Support scheme be noted;
2. That consultation be undertaken on a Local Council Tax Support scheme on the options of a 12%, 14%, 16%, 18% and 20% scheme and that the results be reported to a future meeting of the Committee prior to a recommendation being made to full Council.

52. Hartlepool Power Stations Detailed Emergency Planning Zone Redetermination *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)*

Type of decision

Key Decision (test (ii)) Forward Plan Reference No. RN13/19.

Purpose of report

To report the change in the Radiation Emergency Preparedness and Public Information Regulations (REPPPIR) regulations which now places a duty of determining the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ) for the Power Station on the Local Authority.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods reported that the REPPPIR regulations had recently been updated and came into effect on 22nd May 2019. The new regulations now placed a duty for the determination of the DEPZ on the Local Authority. The Director stated that

it was proposed to utilise the Emergency Management Response Team to lead on the planning for the DEPZ along with the Emergency Planning Unit and the Cleveland Local Resilience Forum to complete the determination of the DEPZ by 22nd November 2019 at the latest. The Local Authority would then have a further 6 months to complete the update to the Off-Site Emergency Response Plan and provision of written confirmation to the operator and regulator by 22nd May 2020.

The Chair requested that a report be submitted to Members ahead of the submission to the regulator.

Decision

1. That the changes in the regulations and the increased expectation and timeframe placed on Local Authorities to comply with REPPIR 19 be noted.
2. That the Councils Emergency Management Response Team progresses the work on the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ) Off-Site Emergency Response Plan in line with Radiation Emergency Preparedness and Public Information Regulations (REPPIR) 2019.
3. That an update report is provided to Finance and Policy members prior to the submission of the Off-Site Emergency Response Plan to the regulator.

53. Reclamation of Stranton Cemetery Land *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)*

Type of decision

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

Purpose of report

To seek approval to the proposed funding allocation to undertake the necessary works at Stranton, and to refer this proposal to Council for approval.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods reported that In 2016/17 52 number of allotment holders had to be relocated from Stranton to other allotment sites to allow for the expansion of cemetery land and provide future years provision of burial spaces at Stranton. Since 2018 the vacant allotment sites have remained empty and access has been restricted as the site has secured by a boundary fence.

However, in recent months the site has been a target for children and young adults which has resulted in fires at the site, damage to the boundary fence, anti-social behaviour, and reports of drug taking and alcohol being consumed in some of the old, abandoned allotment sheds. This has led to a number complaints from members of the public and local councillors.

Officers had liaised with specialist companies to help identify the urgent works required at the site to make it safe and had instructed that those works to commence, which would involve the removal of any hazardous waste and demolishing any out buildings that have been left on site. They would also re-secure the site by replacing any areas of fencing that had been damaged, or are missing, and these works would be funded from an existing service budget.

To fully reclaim the site and turn in from allotment land back into land that can be used for burial plots required a more intensive approach as the spoil waste will need to be removed and screened, before disposal. It was proposed to undertake a procurement exercise that would look to identify a suitable contractor who can undertake the necessary works. The estimated costs were detailed in Confidential Appendix to the report which contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely, (para 3), information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

Members questioned if the area of land was subject to flooding as was the case with other parts of the cemetery and whether the full works to reclaim the land for cemetery use would involve all the land up to the backs of the houses in in Southbrooke Avenue with appropriate fencing installed. The Director stated that the flooding issue would be addressed when the land was prepared for cemetery use. In relation to the houses on Southbrooke Avenue, this could be looked at.

Members referred to the numbers of complaints about this land and its general condition. Had the land been in the ownership of a private owner or an allotment was in a similar condition, the Council would have been looking to take action against that owner/allotment holder some time ago; there was an element of double standards. The Director acknowledged the concerns expressed.

The meeting considered that it may be useful that once the land was cleared and secure that it be designated cemetery land and that notices on the land state such and that it was regularly patrolled. This was supported by the Chair.

Decision

1. That approval be given to the undertaking of a procurement exercise and associated costs as detailed in the Confidential Appendix to the

report which contains exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely, (para 3), information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

2. That a further report, for information, be brought back to Finance and Policy Committee confirming the exact costs of these works once the procurement exercise and the necessary works had been completed.

54. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

None.

55. 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 56 – Tees Valley Future Waste Treatment and Disposal – 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 3) information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

56. Tees Valley Future Waste Treatment and Disposal (*Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods*) 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 3) information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

Type of decision

Key decision Reference RN14/19. Key test (i) and (ii) apply.

Purpose of report

This report sought approval to:

- Adopt the Outline Business Case for the future treatment of municipal residual waste on behalf of the five Tees Valley (TV) Councils (as set out in Appendix 2 to the report);
- Enter into an Inter-Authority Agreement (IAA), between the five Tees Valley authorities in respect of the TV municipal residual waste treatment project (as set out in Appendix 3 to the report); and
- Note the Terms of Reference for the Project Delivery Group (as set out in Appendix 4 to the report).

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods reported on the Outline Business Case (OBC) which had been developed to address the future treatment of municipal residual waste (waste remaining after recycled material has been removed) collected by the Tees Valley Councils when the current contract(s) expire in March 2025. Details are set out in the exempt section of the minutes.

Decision

The detailed decisions are set out in the exempt section of the minutes.

The meeting concluded at 10.55 am.

H MARTIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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