

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

15 November 2019

The meeting commenced at 1.00 pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor: John Tennant (In the Chair)

Councillors: Stephen Akers-Belcher, Dave Hunter, Marjorie James, Sue Little and Amy Prince

Also Present:

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2 Councillor Tony Richardson was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Lee Cartwright

Councillors Christopher Akers-Belcher and Brenda Loynes

Officers: Denise McGuckin, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Tony Hanson, Assistant Director (Environment and Neighbourhood Services)
Kieran Bostock, Transport and Infrastructure Manager
Steve Hilton, Senior Public Relations Officer
Denise Wimpenny, Principal Democratic Services Officer

33. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Lee Cartwright.

34. Declarations of Interest

None.

35. Minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2019

Received.

36. Contaminated Land Updated Strategy (*Assistant Director, Environment and Neighbourhood Services*)

Type of decision

Key decision – test (ii) applies. Forward Plan Reference No RN11/19

Purpose of report

To seek approval for the adoption of the updated Hartlepool Borough Council Land Inspection Strategy.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Committee was advised of the background to the requirement of the Council to produce a strategy in relation to identifying and addressing contaminated land within the borough. The Strategy would be used in conjunction with the wider objectives of the Council, details of which were set out in the report. The aims of the strategy were to ensure contaminated land was identified, to assess the impact of high risk areas and ensure processes were in place for inspecting contaminated land.

The proposed strategy was not intended to identify how sites would be remediated but set out the framework and processes that the authority would follow in order to meet its statutory duties.

A query was raised as to whether there were any sites which may potentially cause contamination problems from industry related activities that the Council may not be aware of, examples of which were provided. Assurances were provided that based on historical information and the risk based approach of this strategy such issues should be identified.

The Director was pleased to report that Kieran Bostock, the Transport and Infrastructure Manager, and his team had been recognised nationally and regionally for their work on coastal protection and had received four awards in recognition of this work. Tributes and thanks to the team were made by Members for their hard work in achieving such recognition.

Decision

That the updated Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy be approved.

37. Refurbishment of Stranton Crematorium Chapel

(Assistant Director, Environment and Neighbourhood Services)

Type of decision

Key decision – test (i) applies. Forward Plan Reference No RN16/19

The report had been intended for submission to the Committee in October, however, due to a seminar arranged for October to inform Members of the options available for the site this date could not be achieved. This is, therefore a departure from the Forward Plan.

Purpose of report

To approve the proposed refurbishment of Stranton Crematorium Chapel and seek approval to meet the budget shortfall as part of the 2020/21 MTFS proposals to be referred to Council.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Environment and Neighbourhood Services presented the report which included background information to the requirement to undertake refurbishment works at Stranton Crematorium Chapel. The final details of the scheme were still being developed, however, they were likely to include work to the chapel roofs, re-pointing, work to parapets and coping stones, treatment to eradicate salt deposits on chapel walls, new lime plaster and an electrical upgrade.

A number of options had been considered including doing nothing, closing the building for three to four months whilst work was carried out or using an alternative structure for services such as a temporary building or converting the redundant nursery shop. The preferred option would be to carry out work in one space while the other was in operation, details of which were provided. The consultation showed strong support for the refurbishment of the chapel whilst still in operation and it was therefore considered the most effective way to deliver this would be to work Friday to Monday. Members were referred to the financial considerations as outlined in a confidential appendix attached to the report. **This item 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).**

During the lengthy discussion that followed a number of issues were raised which included concerns that a Members' Seminar and a joint meeting had not been held to seek Members' input on this issue. The Director advised

that a Members' Seminar had taken place on 9 October which was arranged by Democratic Services. Concerns were also raised regarding the state of disrepair of the chapel and the timescales for implementation of the proposed works. In relation to the proposal to commence works in the spring of 2020, views were expressed that refurbishment works should commence as a matter of urgency. In response to further concerns raised regarding the need for a long term as opposed to a short term solution, whilst the Director acknowledged Members' frustrations, the importance of refurbishment works in the short term until such time as alternative land could be identified was highlighted. It was noted that a report would be submitted to Committee in the next 12 months outlining future options.

A Member made reference to a recent conversation with the Chief Solicitor which clarified that joint meetings were no longer permitted, details of which were provided. However, there would still be an opportunity for other interested Members to attend the meeting and participate. Clarification was sought as to whether an alternative means of funding was available to avoid the need for prudential borrowing and whether this could be explored as part of the budget process. Whilst officers agreed to explore this issue, the Committee was advised that no guarantees could be given.

A Ward Member raised concerns regarding continuing complaints received in his ward in relation to ongoing flooding in the cemetery and referred to the emotional impact on individuals as a result. It was suggested that reassurances be provided to the public, via a press release, of the work that was being done in this regard.

Decision

- (i) The Committee agreed to carry out the proposed works to the chapel.
- (ii) That the proposal be referred to the Finance and Policy Committee in order to be included within the 2020/21 MTFS proposals to be referred to Council as outlined in a Confidential Appendix 1. **This item 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).**
- (iii) That an update report be presented to a future meeting of this Committee in relation to future options for Stranton Crematorium Chapel.
- (iv) That alternative funding opportunities be explored to avoid the need for prudential borrowing.

- (v) That the public be provided with reassurances of the ongoing work and proposals for Stranton Cemetery.

38. Vehicle and Equipment Approvals 2019-2021 (*Assistant Director, Environment and Neighbourhood Services*)

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

- (i) To provide an update on vehicle purchases made in 2018/19.
- (ii) To provide an update of the vehicle replacement budget for the current financial year, including vehicle purchases rephrased from prior years.
- (iii) Propose the vehicle and associated equipment replacement programme for the 3 year period covering 2020/21 to 2022/23;
- (iv) To request that Finance and Policy Committee recommend that the approval for borrowing to fund the related capital expenditure is included in the 2020/21 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) approved by Council.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Environment and Neighbourhood Services, presented the report which outlined the background to the combined vehicle asset appraisal and service review that had been undertaken with Service Managers and Team Leaders. An options appraisal of vehicle financing had previously demonstrated that borrowing was the most cost effective way of funding vehicle purchases, particularly as vehicles were now kept for their maximum usable economic life. The advantages of borrowing compared to leasing were provided, as set out in the report.

Reviews of service needs had resulted in a revised replacement programme for 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 and a preliminary one for 2022/23, the financial considerations of which were provided as set out in the report. Members were referred to the revised replacement programme for the three year period covering 2020/21 to 2022/23, attached at Appendix C, and the future borrowing approvals to be recommended for inclusion within the 2020/21 MTFS, a summary of which was included in the report.

The benefits of including additional information in the report in relation to the age of vehicles was discussed as well as the advantages of including further information of this type such as repair costs was suggested. Members noted that existing vehicles had been extended to the viable limit taking into account the higher cost of maintaining an ageing fleet. The need to publicise the reasons for renewing vehicles was suggested.

Decision

- (i) That the updated position for vehicle purchases in 2018/19 years, as set out in Appendix A, and the updated list for 2019/20, as set out in Appendix B, be noted.
- (ii) The Committee approved that proposed replacement programme of vehicles, heavy plant and associated equipment, as set out in Appendix C, and related borrowing approvals set out in paragraph 5.8, to be referred to Finance and Policy Committee to recommend to Council as part of the 2020/21 MTFS.
- (iii) That future reports include more detailed information around repair bills and the reasons for renewing vehicles be publicised.

39. Strategic Financial Management Report – as at 30 September 2019 *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods and Director of Finance and Policy)*

Type of decision

For information

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to inform Members of the 2019/20 forecast General Fund Outturn, the 2019/20 Capital Programme Monitoring and provide details for the specific budget areas for which the Committee was responsible.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods presented the report which provided the background and financial reporting arrangements for 2019/20 as well as a summary of the overall Council financial position and General Fund outturn information in relation to the Regeneration and Neighbourhood Services Department.

Details of the overall budget position for the Regeneration and Neighbourhood Services Department was summarised in a table included in the report together with the reasons for the forecast outturn. Further details of specific budget areas this Committee was responsible for were outlined at Appendix A and the report also included a breakdown of capital expenditure.

Decision

The report was noted.

40. Savings Programme 2020/21 *(Assistant Director, Environment and Neighbourhood Services)*

Type of decision

Budget and Policy Framework

Purpose of report

To provide Members with additional information to consider proposals to achieve savings in 2020/21 presented at the October meeting of this Committee and to provide feedback on these proposals to the Finance and Policy Committee.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods reported on the background to the Committee's consideration of the savings report at the last meeting and Members' request that a further report be provided to this Committee with additional information in relation to the savings proposals which included the detail of budget lines reflected in the Council's budget book.

The Committee was provided with additional information which included the following, details of which were set out in the report:-

- Risks associated with introducing a charge for garden waste collections
- Costs of opening the Household Waste Recycling Centre on bank holidays and 7 days a week
- Household Waste Recycling Centre Permit Scheme digital technology proposals
- Mattresses - impact of introducing mattress collection charges
- Environmental Services mechanical sweeper arrangements
- Grass cutting/litter picking A689

- Other budget information
- Vacancies
- Environmental Enforcement Review

Members considered in detail the additional information provided and expressed a number of views/queries/comments which included the following:-

- (i) A query was raised regarding the benefits of introducing a Household Recycling Permit Scheme and whether usage by unlicensed commercial operators, landlords and people from outside the borough was at such a level to warrant such monitoring. The Director explained the rationale and background in relation to the proposals indicating that other authorities had seen a reduction in tonnages since introducing the scheme. Whilst there was no information available to quantify the level of usage, the workforce had indicated there was evidence of abuse. Arrangements would be made to monitor the situation whereupon this would be reviewed and reported back to Members.
- (ii) A lengthy debate ensued in relation to the waste management arrangements to which the Director provided clarification in response to queries/suggestions made. Further concerns were raised that Members were being asked to make a decision on a permit scheme without robust facts and figures or case studies in support of the proposals and further information in this regard was requested. It was later confirmed that this information had been provided at the previous meeting of this Committee.
- (iii) Reference was made to the recent budget settlement and a query was raised as to whether the financial position across Neighbourhood Service areas had improved as a result of this year's grant settlement. The Director advised that this query would be referred to the Director of Finance and Policy, however, as far as she was concerned there had not.
- (iv) With regard to the proposed reduction in mechanical sweepers from two to one, concerns were raised regarding the adverse impact in terms of street cleanliness issues and potential flooding/gulley blockages.
- (v) In relation to a query raised regarding the timescales for providing feedback to Members in relation to the outcome of meetings with neighbouring local authorities to ascertain how they undertake their grounds maintenance and litter operations adjacent to their highways work, including information around robot grass cutters, the Committee was advised that a report would be provided once the potential risks associated with these issues had been examined in full and upon receipt of information from neighbouring authorities.

- (vii) The Director provided clarification in response to further queries raised in relation to aspects of the report.
- (viii) A Member reiterated comments expressed at the previous budget meeting that he would not support charges for the collection of garden waste or mattresses and would not support proposals in relation to the household recycling permit scheme until such time as there was sufficient supporting information to enable Members to make an informed decision, the potential implications of which were outlined.
- (ix) A Member referred to recent road closures in the town as a result of maintenance works and requested that advance notice be provided to the public in relation to any planned closures.
- (x) Prior to concluding the debate, further discussion ensued in relation to the decision making process and the potential implications of individuals not supporting the budget. Members were advised that the differing views of Members in relation to the proposed garden waste collection charges had been reflected in the minutes of the last meeting which would be included in the response to Finance and Policy Committee.

Decision

- (i) That the contents of the report and comments of Members, as outlined above, be noted and be utilised to formulate a response to be presented to Finance and Policy Committee.
- (ii) That further information be provided in relation to the Household Waste Recycling Permit Scheme, the potential for introducing a robotic service for grounds maintenance and litter clearance on the A689.
- (iii) That clarification be provided following the meeting as to whether the financial position had improved across Neighbourhood Service areas as a result of the grant settlement.

41. Date of Next Meeting

The Chair reported that the next meeting scheduled for Friday 13 December would be rescheduled. A provisional date had been suggested of Tuesday 10 December 2019 at 10.00 am, confirmation of which would be circulated in due course.

The meeting concluded at 2.35 pm.

H MARTIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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