

# **FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE**

## **MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD**

### **15 FEBRUARY 2021**

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and was an online remote meeting in compliance with the Council Procedure Rules Relating to the holding of Remote Meetings and the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

**Present:**

Councillor Shane Moore (In the Chair)

Councillors: Christopher Akers-Belcher, James Brewer, Jim Lindridge, Sue Little, Ann Marshall, Leisa Smith, John Tennant, Stephen Thomas and.

Also Present: Councillor Cameron Stokell as substitute for Councillor Mike Young in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2.  
Councillor Tony Richardson.  
Mr Darab Rezai

Officers: Denise McGuckin, Managing Director  
Hayley Martin, Chief Solicitor  
Neil Wilson, Assistant Chief Solicitor  
Chris Little, Director of Resources and Development  
Beverley Bearne, Assistant Director, Development and Growth  
Jill Harrison, Director of Adult and Community Based Services  
Tony Hanson, Director of Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services  
Ed Turner, Communications and Marketing Team  
David Cosgrove and Denise Wimpenny, Democratic Services Team

### **73. Apologies for Absence**

Councillors Paddy Brown and Mike Young.

### **74. Declarations of Interest**

None at this point in the meeting.

During the debate recorded at Minute 83, Councillor Thomas declared a personal interest.

## **75. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 February, 2021**

With reference to Minute 63 “Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2021/22 and 2022/23”, Councillor C Akers-Belcher referred to the £670m of new grant funding and requested that clarification be sought from Government as to how that funding should be committed within local authorities. The Member also sought detail of the specific amount granted to Hartlepool and how this was being utilised.

The Director of Resources and Development commented that the funding was for supporting the additional costs in providing LCTS to, what was expected to be, an increasing number of households during the year. Last year’s Government grant for LCTS had been mandated by Government at further reducing the burden on LCTS households directly. There was no such mandate attached to the funding for 2021/22. The funding for 2021/22 was being used to meet increased LCTS caseload costs and to protect all Council Tax payers and the Council’s budget.

The Chair indicated that as the clarification from Government had been requested, it should be sought by officers and shared with all Councillors.

The minutes of the meeting were confirmed.

## **76. Minutes of the meeting of the Safer Hartlepool Partnership held on 13 November 2020**

Received.

## **77. Minutes of the meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board held on 7 September 2020**

Received.

## **78. Public Question**

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

A public question for the Council meeting on 28 January 2021 had been received from Mr Darab Rezai. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.8, the Managing Director, in consultation with the Chair of Council, considered that the question would be more appropriately referred to the next relevant Policy Committee for answer to be dealt with in accordance with the Council’s Protocol for Public Questions at Policy Committee meetings. The question had, therefore, been referred to this meeting of the Finance and Policy Committee.

Mr Rezai’s question, as submitted, was as follows –

Hartlepool is a beautiful seaside town, with so much potential. Our town has History and Heritage, a beautiful seafront and marina however that alone is not enough for our town to bring all generations into Hartlepool to benefit our community, residents and employment.

The town is in desperate need of an iconic building with multiple uses to bring people from the town and out of town to improve the economy and employment. The prime location for this iconic building would be Jackson's Landing.

The Hartlepool Borough Council has got plans to put a leisure centre on such a prime location, the leisure centre can be located anywhere accessible for the residents.

My question is:

In 2017 the Council enacted their policy that they would no longer run any commercial operations that did not make a profit and subsequently Inspiration Garden Centre at Tanfield was closed. Can you confirm that the Council has a robust business case for the new £20m leisure facility proposed for the Waterfront to both make a profit and repay the prudential borrowing of £10 million, given the Council Tax payers of Hartlepool have had to bear the burden of losses in this area of the Council budget for years?

Mr Rezai commented on his involvement with the hospitality and business community in the town and indicated that business leaders wished to see an iconic building on the Jackson's Landing site that would bring visitors and trade into the town. Mr Rezai did not consider relocating the leisure centre to the site would create that business and prosperity the town needed.

The Chair stated that he had been delighted to announce the replacement of the Mill House Leisure Centre at Jackson's Landing. The new facility would attract visitors and retain those who were travelling out of Hartlepool to visit better leisure facilities. Leisure facilities would always require a subsidy to make them affordable for local residents but in terms of the current leisure facilities across the whole of the town, these equated to only 1% of the average Council Tax bill; Child and Adult Social Care accounted for 58%. The new facility was to attract significant grant funding from the Tees Valley Combined Authority and the prudential borrowing required would not increase the Council Tax commitment to leisure. The Chair commented on the previous administration's closure of the Tanfield nursery and café stating that was the correct decision for the Council to make.

Mr Rezai questioned the spending on feasibility and design of the new leisure centre and maintained that an iconic entertainment's venue would bring more income into the Council and the town. The Chair commented that this had not always been Mr Rezai's belief and that Hartlepool already had some iconic buildings.

In the following debate some Members commented that these views were being expressed now when the Council had already committed itself to a

new leisure facility but had not come through the extensive consultation undertaken prior to the development of the plan for the future of leisure provision in the town. Members considered that there were already iconic buildings in the town and Hartlepool desperately needed the Mill House leisure centre to be replaced. The Managing Director also highlighted that the consultation process had considered a number of sites for the new leisure centre.

Members' commented on the business case for the new leisure facility indicating that this had not yet been presented to Members and this should be brought forward at the earliest opportunity so the Council could be seen to be open and honest with the public as to how much the new facility would cost and how much subsidy would be required on an ongoing basis. The Managing Director stated that the development of the business plan had been delayed due to the effects of the Covid-29 Pandemic but would be brought to Members early in the new Municipal Year.

### **Decision**

That Mr Rezai be thanked for his question and that the debate be noted.

## **79. Council Plan 2021/22 - 2023/24** *(Managing Director)*

### **Type of decision**

Budget and Policy Framework.

### **Purpose of report**

The purpose of the report was to seek Committee approval to the proposed Council Plan 2021/22 – 2023/24 to go forward to Council for adoption.

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

The Managing Director presented the draft Council Plan for Members' consideration. Subject to the Committee's approval, it was proposed to submit the plan to the next Council meeting on 25 February 2021 for adoption.

Members sought clarification as to the section "resilient and resourceful communities with opportunities for all" as to how that was to be delivered and measured. An indication of how much financial support had been provided to the food bank in this financial year was also sought. The Managing Director undertook to share the measures and the information on the foodbank with Members prior to Council.

The following recommendation was agreed without dissent.

## **Decision**

That the Council Plan 2021/22 – 2023/24 be forward to Council for adoption.

## **80. Medium Term Financial Strategy – 2021/22 Statutory Budget and Council Tax Determination** *(Director of Resources and Development)*

### **Type of decision**

Budget and Policy Framework.

### **Purpose of report**

The report provided details of the final 2021/22 Local Government Finance settlement announcement and advised Members of the arrangements to finalise the 2021/22 technical budget calculations to be referred to Council on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

The Director of Resources and development reported that the government's final settlement was issued on 4th February 2020 and there had been no changes to the provisional settlement. This included the Government confirming:

- a 2% core Council Tax Referendum Limit; and
- a 3% Adult Social Care precept which can either be applied in 2021/22 or deferred to 2022/23.

As previously reported to Finance and Policy Committee and Council the approved budget strategy for 2021/22 was reliant on the use of the Budget Support Fund (£4.212m) and one off Government Grant funding (£0.985m). These measures deferred a budget deficit from 2021/22 and the Council would need to develop a strategy to address a 2022/23 forecast deficit of £5.639m (including £4.047m deferred from 2021/22).

The Director confirmed that Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner had confirmed a precept increase of £5.19 at Band D, 1.99%, which is below the £15 referendum set by Government. Cleveland Fire Authority had confirmed an increase of 1.9%, which is £1.50 at Band D. which is below the 2% referendum set by Government. The overall bill that people without a Parish Council precept would pay would increase by 0.32%, reflecting these increase and the freeze in Council's own Council Tax and Adult Social Care precept.

The following recommendations were agreed without dissent.

## **Decision**

1. The Committee noted that the final 2021/22 Local Government Finance settlement had been issued on 4th February 2021 and there had been no changes to the provisional settlement and, therefore, there were no changes to the Budget and Council Tax proposals approved by Council on 28th January 2021;
2. The Committee noted that the detailed 2021/22 statutory Council Tax calculations, incorporating the Council Tax levels set by individual precepting authorities i.e. the Police and Crime Commissioner, Cleveland Fire Authority and individual parish councils, will be referred to Council on 25th February.

## **81. Allocation of the Community Pot** (*Director of Adult and Community Based Services*)

### **Type of decision**

Non-key decision.

### **Purpose of report**

To seek agreement from the Finance and Policy Committee regarding the allocation of the Community Pot.

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

The Director of Adult and Community Based Services reported that the Committee made a decision on 13 August 2020 to create a Community Pot to support the COVID19 recovery. The Community Pot was created utilising the balance of New Burdens funding, an element of the Family Poverty Reserve, an underspend on ward Member budgets and the uncommitted balance of the Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant for food and essential supplies giving a total of £225,000. The decision identified that £25,000 of the £225,000 would be used to support a programme of activities for young people, with the remaining £200,000 to be used to support community-led initiatives aimed at tackling the social and economic impact of COVID19.

The Director set out the recommendations of the officer/voluntary community sector group that had reviewed and considered all the bids submitted in accordance with the approved criteria. Details of all the bids received, which totalled over £1m outstripping the funding available were set out in a confidential appendix to the report. The appendix 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). Details of the projects that were recommended for approval

and the proposed amounts for each was set out in the open part of the report, where six bids were proposed for support. These recommendations would fully utilise the £200,000 available.

The Committee debated the proposals and specifically the criteria and decision making process. Members expressed concern that the projects would be sustainable and that the groups involved had been fully financially assessed. The Director stated that these were Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups that wouldn't have audited accounts in the same way as commercial businesses but did submit annual accounts to the Charity Commissioners as required by law. Some Members considered that such groups should be subject to the same financial rigour as this was public money being spent. As Members indicated a desire to review some of the details set out in the exempt appendix to the report the meeting moved into closed session.

### **Decision**

That the meeting move into closed session.

**The meeting was in closed session.**

## **82. 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 83 – Allocation of the Community Pot – 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).

## **83. Allocation of the Community Pot** (*Director of Adult and Community Based Services*) 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)

### **Type of decision**

Non-key decision.

### **Purpose of report**

To seek agreement from the Finance and Policy Committee regarding the allocation of the Community Pot.

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

During the short debate in closed session, Members raised questions around the monitoring of the expenditure of the money allocated to groups, particularly where there were several smaller VCS grouped together in a larger bid. Some Members suggested delaying the decision to allow review of the bids. The Director stated that the bids, some of which were very detailed, had been fully assessed by the panel. The Chair stated that had Members wanted to be involved in the process of considering the bids, they should have indicated that at the earlier meeting.

Councillor Thomas declared a personal interest as one of the bids was from a group based at West View Community Centre, where he was a Trustee of the West View Project - Children and Young Peoples Activity Centre Limited.

### **Decision**

That the meeting return to open session

**The meeting returned to open session.**

## **84. Allocation of the Community Pot** (*Director of Adult and Community Based Services*)

### **Type of decision**

Non-key decision.

### **Purpose of report**

To seek agreement from the Finance and Policy Committee regarding the allocation of the Community Pot.

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

Members clarified that in future bids for the allocation of funds to the voluntary and community sector more robust vetting and monitoring should be included within the process. The Managing Director reminded Members that these funds were one-off monies and the process had followed corporate procedures.

The following recommendations were agreed without dissent.



## Decision

That approval be given to the following funding allocations from the Community Pot: -

App. No	Proposal	Funding Requested	Recommended Funding from Community Pot
3	Financial Advice and Support (including benefit appeals)	£60,700	£34,500
5	Hartlepool Financial Inclusion Partnership	£36,500	£36,500
9	Get Connected – digital inclusion project	£40,900	£40,900
12	Community Led Inclusion Partnership	£48,800	£48,800
14	Supported Housing and Counselling for Homeless and Vulnerable	£15,000	£15,000
18	Accessible IT equipment and training	£24,300	£24,300

## 85. **Community Wealth Fund Alliance** *(Assistant Director, Preventative and Community Based Services)*

### Type of decision

Non-key decision.

### Purpose of report

To provide members with information regarding the Community Wealth Fund Alliance and to seek support from members to sign up to the Community Wealth Fund Alliance alongside 290 other civil society, public and private sector organisations.

### Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Adult and Community Based Services reported that the Community Wealth Fund Alliance is calling on government to release dormant assets of up to £4 billion for the creation of a new independent endowment – ‘The Community Wealth Fund’. This would provide long term investment putting left behind communities in charge of spend and enabling them to build on social capital and civic infrastructure that they need to ‘level up’ their areas to enable them to prosper.

The Community Wealth Fund Alliance has identified that there are four left behind communities in Hartlepool; Jesmond, Headland and Harbour, De Bruce and Manor House. The Victoria ward has not been identified

because of the assessment used identifying proximity and perceived access to services and the level of other activity in the ward. If the progression of the Community Wealth Alliance fund was successful it is proposed that all four wards would be awarded £2 million for a period of 10-15 years.

A Member highlighted that the Alliance had been petitioning for this support for over a decade and it need to be acknowledged that obtaining a share of such money was some way off, but being worked towards.

The following recommendation was agreed without dissent.

### **Decision**

That the proposals be supported and that the Council signs up to the Community Wealth Fund Alliance either independently as an organisation or through a collaboration with the Voluntary and Community Sector.

## **86. Kilmarnock Road Resource Centre** *(Director of Resources and Development)*

### **Type of decision**

Non Key Decision.

### **Purpose of report**

The purpose of this report was to seek approval to offer Kilmarnock Road Resource Centre for Community Asset Transfer on a lease basis.

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

The Assistant Director, Development and Growth reported on the background to the Kilmarnock Road Resource Centre and indicated that, in view of the nature and use of the building and the recent history of it, it was proposed to offer the premises to let on a long term basis by way of a Community Asset Transfer. This is a recognised means of enabling not for profit organisations to deliver their own solutions to local needs and demands for services. The Community Asset Transfer process included a minimum 6 week marketing period during which tenders are invited for the opportunity. Interested parties are required to complete an assessment of their suitability and to provide written tenders which are then evaluated. Assuming an acceptable tender is received in this instance a lease would be granted which includes the requirements for community uses. Alternatively the premises could be let on a commercial basis or sold but these courses of action would be much less likely to retain the community uses and services.

Members questioned the need for the property to be marketed while there were current tenants in the building providing community services. It was

suggested that the Localism Act allowed for the transfer of the property to the current occupiers and that option should be pursued first rather than marketing.

The Chair supported the proposal and stated that should it be possible for the transfer be done at no cost to the Council, this should be done.

The following recommendation was agreed without dissent.

### **Decision**

That approval be given to the potential of offering the property on a Community Asset Transfer basis subject to any provisions within the Localism Act and that conclusion of the process and approval of the detailed terms be delegated to the Director of Resources and Development in consultation with the Chair of the Committee.

## **87. Community Governance Review – Elwick** *(Chief Solicitor)*

### **Type of decision**

Non-key Decision.

### **Purpose of report**

This report presents feedback from consultation with stakeholders in Elwick Parish and invited the committee to formulate a view upon the extent to which the proposals are implemented for consideration by Full Council.

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

The Assistant Chief Solicitor reported on the receipt of an appropriate request for a Community Governance Review in the Elwick Parish and the result of the statutory consultation process.

A valid petition from 281 residents proposing that the area of the existing parish, immediately to west of Close Beck Wynyard (see Appendix 1) be removed from Elwick Parish Council and that a stand-alone Wynyard Parish Council (Hartlepool) be established in relation to that area. Of the 745 consultation letters sent, 93 responses were returned (12.5% response). Of those responses 97.8% (91 people) have been supportive of the proposal. Only 2.2% (2 people) have objected to the proposal, both of whom point to the additional level of bureaucracy that an additional parish would create. The proposal has the support of the Wynyard Residents Association and Elwick Parish Council.

Members were asked if they wished to support the proposals as set out in detail in the report together with a suggestion, in accordance with National Association of Local Councils Circular 1126, that both Parish Councils comprise of 7 Parish Councillors. The Assistant Chief Solicitor reported

that should the changes be supported by Council, they would be implemented at the next parish council election for Elwick in May 2022.

Members supported the proposals put forward. There was some questions and discussion around the future funding of the Parish Councils and the impact of the changes on Elwick's own budget.

The following recommendation was agreed without dissent.

### **Decision**

That the Managing Director's business report to Full Council on 25 February 2021, in its consideration of the proposals, indicate this Committee's support for the proposals as reported and that a Parish Council of seven Parish Councillors be recommended in each case.

## **88. Community Governance Review – Greatham (Chief Solicitor)**

### **Type of decision**

Non-key Decision.

### **Purpose of report**

This report presented feedback from consultation with stakeholders in Greatham Parish and invited this committee to formulate a view upon the extent to which the proposals are implemented for consideration by Full Council.

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

The Assistant Chief Solicitor reported on the receipt of an appropriate request for a Community Governance Review in the Greatham Parish and the result of the statutory consultation process.

In March 2020, the Council received a valid petition from 257 residents proposing that the area of the existing parish, immediately to the north of Stockton Road (South Fens) be removed from Greatham Parish Council but without an alternative Parish Council being established. Of the 925 consultation letters sent, 92 responses were returned (10% response). Of those responses 77% (71 people) supported the proposal, 19% (17 people) were against the proposal and 4% (4 people) expressed no opinion. These consultation responses must also be considered alongside the 257 residents of the area who had signed and supported the originating petition.

Of those who support the proposal a common theme is that the residents of Greatham Village and those of South Fens do not view themselves as being part of a single cohesive community. They point to the geographical differences, the clear dividing boundary (the A689) and that the distinct

nature and appearance of the areas. A Member, and Ward Councillor for the Fens, commented that the response of the differences between the two communities was disappointing and should be viewed in light of the soon to be implemented ward boundary review which would place the two communities in the same Council Ward. The Chair indicated that his experience on the Headland, with a parish council within part of the ward, did not lead to a wider community disconnect.

The following recommendation was agreed without dissent.

### **Decision**

That the Managing Director's business report to Full Council on 25 February 2021, in its consideration of the proposals, indicate this Committee's support for the proposals as reported and that a Parish Council of seven Parish Councillors be recommended.

## **89. Corporate Procurement Quarterly Report on Contracts** *(Chief Solicitor)*

### **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.
- Receiving and examining reports on any exemptions granted in respect of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

The Chief Solicitor reported on the Contracts awarded by the Council in accordance with Contract Procedure Rules for the period November 2020 to February 2021.

As Members indicated a desire to review some of the details set out in the exempt appendix to the report the meeting moved into closed session.

### **Decision**

That the meeting move into closed session.

**The meeting was in closed session.**

## **90. 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 91 – Corporate Procurement Quarterly Report on Contracts – 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).

## **91. Corporate Procurement Quarterly Report on Contracts** *(Chief Solicitor)* 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)

### **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.
- Receiving and examining reports on any exemptions granted in respect of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

During the debate in closed session questions were raised in relation to a contract with a local company who started a 'meals on wheels' type service during the Covid-19 Pandemic Lockdown. The Director of Adult and Community based Services clarified that the service had been aimed at people who were Clinically Extremely Vulnerable and shielding during the lockdown period. The service initially provide meals at Christmas and New Year and was then asked to extend the service for a further 6 week period. All those supported would be known to the Adults Social Services department and officers would have knowledge of any support they were

receiving from other groups. From the information it was possible to report how much each meal had cost but they had been provided in line with the council's policies on healthy eating and the service could meet individual's dietary requirements.

In future arrangements, Members sought some differentiation between paid employees and voluntary workers involved with such one-off contracts.

**Decision**

That the meeting return to open session.

**The meeting returned to open session.**

**89. Corporate Procurement Quarterly Report on Contracts** (*Chief Solicitor*)

**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.
- Receiving and examining reports on any exemptions granted in respect of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

**Issue(s) for consideration**

The Chief Solicitor reported on the Contracts awarded by the Council in accordance with Contract Procedure Rules for the period November 2020 to February 2021.

**Decision**

That the report be noted.

**90. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent**

None.

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on Monday 15 March, 2021 at 10.00 am,

The meeting concluded at 12.20 pm.

**H MARTIN**

**CHIEF SOLICITOR**

**PUBLICATION DATE: 24 MARCH 2021**