

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

15 MARCH 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, Jim Lindridge, Sue Little, Ann Marshall, Amy Prince, Leisa Smith, John Tennant, Stephen Thomas and Mike Young.

Also Present: Councillors Marjorie James and Tony Richardson.

Officers: Denise McGuckin, Managing Director
Hayley Martin, Chief Solicitor
Chris Little, Director of Resources and Development
James Magog, Assistant Director, Finance
Tim Wynn, Strategic Asset Manager
Jill Harrison, Director of Adult and Community Based Services
Gemma Ptak, Assistant Director, Preventative and Community Based Services
Tony Hanson, Director of Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services
Amanda Whitaker and David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

91. Apologies for Absence

Councillor James Brewer.

92. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Christopher Akers-Belcher declared a personal interest as a Trustee of the National Museum of the Royal Navy (Minute 100 refers).

93. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2021

Confirmed.

94. Minutes of the meeting of the Safer Hartlepool Partnership held on 22 January 2021

Received.

95. Minutes of the meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board held on 7 December 2020

Received.

96. Proposal for Pilot Bulky Waste Scheme (*Director of Neighbourhood and Regulatory Services*)

Type of decision

Key Decision, Test (ii). General Exception Notice Applies.

Purpose of report

At the meeting on 1st December 2020, it was agreed that consideration of an annual ward bulky waste pilot scheme be explored and presented for consideration as part of the 2021/22 budget considerations. Two options were presented for consideration on 25th January and it was agreed that a further report would be considered by this Committee which explored those options further and clarified points raised by Members.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Neighbourhood and Regulatory Services reported on the detailed background to the proposals to extend the bulky waste collection service and the incidents of fly-tipping which Members sought to address. It was highlighted that much 'fly-tipping occurred in back streets and was generally household waste.

It was proposed that the Council would introduce a self-funded extension of the existing scheme for a further 12 months based on the current charging requirements of £20 for 3 items, discounted to £10 for those on benefits, while the collection of one mattress only would be charged at £7.50. The extension would ensure there was recurring demand to sustain the additional income.

The Council would recruit additional staff, initially on suitable fixed-term contracts, with the intention to double the number of weekly paid collection slots, and at the same time, reduce the waiting times associated with requests for bulky waste removals. This proposal would support residents throughout the year.

This arrangement was expected to be cost neutral to the Council as the income collected from the paid bulky waste collections would offset the

costs incurred for additional officer capacity, vehicle and disposal costs operating on a full time basis, and as such will create additional roles on a fixed term basis.

Details were set out in the report of the alternative proposals investigated including a number of free bulky waste collections for each ward and ceasing the council service and utilising partners to provide the bulky waste collections.

The Director highlighted that a working group involving partners from all sectors and those operating litter-picking initiatives had been established to look at the issues around fly-tipping. One of the major issues identified was around ensuring residents knew 'how to do the right thing' when it came to disposing of waste.

The Chair of the Neighbourhood Services Committee and other Members welcomed the proposals. A Member queried the different charge for mattresses as a single item collection and asked if that single charge could also be applied to other items if it was a single collection only. The Director stated this would be investigated further.

In debate Members suggested that the publicity around the introduction of the revised bulky waste collection scheme also focus on how and what people could recycle and how to check that other operators were licensed and disposed of waste collected properly. It was also suggested some joint publicity and advice from the Fire Authority be included on fly-tipping and the fire risk potential.

Decision

1. That based on the findings of the investigative work, it is proposed that the Council introduce a self-funded extension of the existing bulky waste collection scheme for a further 12 months based on the current charging requirements of £20 for 3 items, discounted to £10 for those on benefits, while the collection of one mattress only would be charged at £7.50.
2. That a publicity campaign is undertaken to promote the service and ensure that the public are aware of the services on offer and that the publicity include additional advice on recycling, the dangers and fines for fly-tipping, advice from the Fire Authority and how householders could identify properly licensed waste disposal companies.

97. Neighbourhood Investment Programme Update (*Director of Neighbourhood and Regulatory Services*)

Type of decision

Key Decision, Test (ii). General Exception Notice Applies.

Purpose of report

To provide an update on the capital investment programme that delivered improvements to neighbourhoods across Hartlepool through the Neighbourhood Investment Programme. The report also proposed three schemes for approval as part of the under spend remaining from the original allocation. The report also sought Members' approval to consider a themed approach to future projects based on the £1m allocation previously approved by Full Council.

Issue(s) for consideration

At a Members Seminar held on 1st March 2021, a presentation was given to update Members on the success of the projects undertaken and to seek their support with the schemes proposed for the existing under spend. Members' views and aspirations were also sought with regards to the new budget allocation and whether the same criteria should be applied for the implementation of new schemes.

There is an unallocated amount of £260,000 from the original £1.5m allocated for the Neighbourhood Investment Programme. Three schemes were presented to Members at the seminar to take forward with the under spend, which Members supported, and are:

- (i) British Cycling's Places to Ride Programme, to develop accessible, traffic-free, community facilities and opportunities that encourage more people to cycle more often and hence lead healthier, more active lives. The project will focus primarily on Summerhill Country Park. Funding is required for the Council to take this project forward, therefore it is proposed to allocate £120,000 from the Neighbourhood Investment Programme budget, which will help us to secure the £250,000 from the British Cycling's Places to Ride Programme.
- (ii) SeaScapes covers the Magnesian Limestone Coast from south of the River Tyne to the River Tees. The project, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, aims to better protect and celebrate this heritage-rich and distinctive coastline. Twenty interconnected projects will be delivered over a period of four years, many of which will be in Hartlepool. These will include the Hartlepool Lights scheme which will repair and restore the Highlight located on the Waterfront and Beacon Tower on North Pier; both grade II listed. It was proposed that £10,000 is allocated from this budget in order to facilitate a scheme of restoration works for each structure.
- (iii) Seaton Carew Bus Station Public Toilets - The bus station is a grade II listed building and provides key public facilities to the south of the area. It is proposed that the remaining allocation of £130,000 is allocated to support work to the property.

The view of Members at the seminar was that the focus of the future £1m funding should be directed towards infrastructure that supports health, physical activity and play, improved toilet facilities and shopping parades. There were 30 projects not taken forward and taking into account the requests of Members at the seminar and those schemes that remain outstanding, they can be split into the following three themes:

Infrastructure that supports Health, Physical Activity and Play – provision of play areas at Masefield Road and Midlothian field, improvements to sports facilities on the Town Moor, a woodland/park/walking /running /nature trail environment on the landfill site along Coronation Drive, enhancement works to the Central Park and improvements to Rift House Recreation Ground.

Toilets – in addition to the work at Seaton Carew Bus Station, survey works to estimate required works at other public toilets.

Shopping Parades – improvements at the north end of Fens Shops, improvements to facades on Northgate and Seaton sea front from Seaton Hotel to Station Lane.

It was also proposed that some funding should be set aside for a project to commemorate the Covid-19 Pandemic.

A ward Member for the Manor ward welcomed the proposal for the new play area and commented that if the site proposed for the playing area at Masefield Road was unsuitable, an area near Swinburne Road could provide an alternative site.

A Member referred to the proposed works at Rift House Recreation Ground and referred to the difficulties accessing the recreation ground, particularly for those with limited mobility and the disabled, which needed to be addressed as a matter of some urgency. The Chair asked that the access issues raised be followed up after the meeting.

There was some discussion around what type of commemoration should be created around the pandemic and the Managing Director and some Members considered that rather than having a memorial to those that had died, something that provided a place of reflection would be more appropriate to reflect not only those that had died but also the huge effort in fighting the virus and how communities had re-engaged and come together. The anniversary of the imposition of the lockdown restrictions was very near and the Managing Director announced that there would be light beacons at the Headland, National Museum of the Royal Navy and Seaton Carew to mark the anniversary.

Decision

1. That the current progress on implementing the Neighbourhood Investment Programme be noted.

2. That the match funding of £120,000 be approved for the British Cycling Bid and that the award of £250,000 be accepted.
3. That the proposed works to provide funding towards Seascape Project of £10,000 be approved.
4. That the proposed works to Seaton Carew Bus Station Public Toilets of £130,000 be approved.
5. That the proposal set out in the report for Phase 2 of the Neighbourhood Investment Plan as reported be approved to allow officers to undertake further work to identify high level estimated costs and explore other funding options to support the delivery of those schemes.

98. Capital Investment Strategy – National Museum for the Royal Navy Projects *(Managing Director)*

Type of decision

Key Decision, Test (ii). General Exception Notice Applies.

Purpose of report

To obtain a decision in relation to the release of capital funding.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Managing Director reported that the NMRN has identified a potential opportunity to secure a major collection of swords which are of national significance and are currently in the ownership of a private individual who wishes to sell this collection. Securing this collection would provide a major national visitor attraction for the expanded NMRN exhibition space. The collection of 300 swords is world class and is the finest collection of naval edged weapons ever assembled and includes Lord Nelson's personal fighting sword which he always carried into battle.

The NMRN are exploring various external funding opportunities to meet all, or part, of the costs of acquiring this collection. However, these options will take many months to progress. In view of the uncertainty regarding potential external funding streams the NMRN has requested that as a fall back the Council releases some of the existing funding to purchase the swords collection. The NMRN recognise that this funding will need to be repaid. The loan agreement with NMRN will specify repayment from either one, or a combination sources set out in the report.

Members supported the proposal with the Chair adding that there was also a more local link with the collection containing the sword of the Captain of HMS Shannon, the sister ship of the Trincomalee.

There was no dissent to the following recommendations.

Decision

1. That the proposals to release funding requested as detailed in confidential appendix to the report be approved. 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, (paragraph 3) information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
2. That authority be delegated to the Managing Director to complete the legal agreement with National Museum for the Royal Navy in accordance with the principles detailed in the report.
3. It was noted that if the National Museum for the Royal Navy drawdown this facility, details of the valuation agreed would be reported to a future meeting of this Committee.

99. Sale of Land at Coronation Drive *(Director of Resources and Development)*

Type of decision

Key Decision, Test (ii). General Exception Notice Applies.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to seek approval for the sale of residential development land at Coronation Drive.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Resources and Development reported the Council owns an area of land extending to approximately 5.6 ha (13.82 acres) adjoining Coronation Drive and Warrior Drive which was brownfield land with former uses including a timber yard, railway sidings and spoil dumping from the former Seaton Carew Iron Works. The site is now grassed but the spoil heap mounds (approximately 10 metres in height) remain and prior to any residential development the land would require very extensive remediation works. In addition, parts of the site had a peat covering to depths of up to 3.0 metres, which was a further impediment to development due to the need for piled or raft foundations, or to avoid building over these areas.

Based on ground investigation reports prepared by a number of firms of geotechnical engineers since 2013, remediation costs have been estimated as 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).

Notwithstanding the nature of the site it had been identified as a suitable location for housing development since at least 2010. The majority of the land (approximately 7.25 acres) was identified as a housing site in the Local Plan adopted in 2018 (reference HSG 3). There had been previous interest in the site which had not progressed, however, following discussions with a major developer specialising in residential urban regeneration, an offer had been received from them for the purchase of the land. The terms are set out in 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).

Successful completion of the proposed sale could result in a capital receipt contributing to the Medium Term Financial Strategy targets as well as enhanced Council Tax revenue. Depending on the mix of properties it was estimated the additional recurring Council Tax income could be between £230,000 and £263,000 once the development is complete and this would help achieve Council Tax growth target included in Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Members expressed concerns at the impact of further housing in Seaton Carew on the infrastructure, particularly the local primary school which Members commented was already too small for the town. The Director of Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services commented that discussion around any potential planning application would include discussions on a Section 106 agreement which could include contributions towards local infrastructure improvements.

Some Members also expressed concern in relation to the land contamination and the works that had to be undertaken on a nearby development to remediate contamination after the development had been finished. The Director indicated that Members could be reassured the developer would need to prepare a remediation plan that satisfied the professional officers of the Council and met statutory requirements. Much had changed since the previous problems.

Members also expressed some concerns that the reported capital receipt may not be achieved due to the remediation costs and a Ward Councillor stated that they would not be able to support the sale should it prove that any future S106 agreement was reduced or void due to the costs of remediation.

Members expressed a desire to discuss some of the matters covered in the confidential appendices to the report and it was moved and seconded that the meeting move into closed session.

Decision

That further consideration of the details contained within the confidential appendix to the report be undertaken in closed session.

100. 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 101 – Sale of Land at Coronation Drive – 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).

101. Sale of Land at Coronation Drive (*Director of Resources and Development*) 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

Key Decision, Test (ii). General Exception Notice Applies.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to seek approval for the sale of residential development land at Coronation Drive.

Issue(s) for consideration

Details of the Committee's discussion is contained in the confidential section of the minutes.

Decision

The meeting returned to open session.

102. Sale of Land at Coronation Drive *(Director of Resources and Development)*

Type of decision

Key Decision, Test (ii). General Exception Notice Applies.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to seek approval for the sale of residential development land at Coronation Drive.

Issue(s) for consideration

Upon returning to open session Members expressed further their concerns at the costs of remediation for the land and the need to protect the Council from any future situation similar to that which occurred at other areas in the past.

A Seaton Ward Councillor commented that many residents were happy with the land as open space. The Chair noted that the land had been identified as potential housing land since the Local Plan adopted in 2010.

The following recommendations were agreed without dissent.

Decision

1. That the proposed offer set out in the confidential appendix to the report be noted. 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).
2. That following further site investigations undertaken by the developer, a further report would be submitted to a future meeting to enable Members to consider the proposed sale terms in relation to the actual value of the capital receipt and section 106 contributions.
3. That progress in achieving this land sale will be reported as part of the 2022/23 budget process to enable Members to approve as strategy for using these resources once it is certain the sale will be completed.

103. Covid-19 Financial Position Update *(Director of Resources and Development)*

Type of decision

Non-key Decision.

Purpose of report

To provide information in relation to funding provided by the Government as direct financial support to address the financial impacts of Covid on the Council and funding the Government allocated to the Council to pay out to third parties.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Resources and Development submitted a comprehensive report setting out details of the various government funding regimes that the Council had had to administer and process as part of the national response to the Covid-19 Pandemic. These included details of the funding directly granted to the Authority to manage the demands and loss of income created by the pandemic and also those regimes where local government had been tasked with distributing funds to businesses and individuals. The Director recorded the Corporate Management Team's thanks to the all staff that had adapted to new ways of working and quickly implementing new schemes and regimes and getting funds out to the community so quickly.

The Chair stated that he wished to record his thanks to all those in the Finance Division for their work in processing all the various support schemes that had come though from government and getting the support out to the community so quickly and asked that his comments be passed on to staff. This was supported by all Members of the Committee. Members also acknowledged the work of the new Assistant Director, Finance who had joined the Council as the pandemic had started.

A Member questioned if there was any action that could or was to be taken against those that had committed fraud in the claiming of grants and those businesses that had accepted the initial support from government of £10,000 and had still subsequently gone out of business. The Director commented that the Chancellor's budget had included a commitment to enhance fraud detection teams. The majority of all the grants paid had been a government direction and their criteria, the Council simply facilitated the payment process. It had to be acknowledged that businesses had failed during the pandemic for very genuine reasons and despite the financial support provided by the Government. The Director also highlighted that the Council was required to submit weekly returns to Government on the various grant regimes it was administering.

The Managing Director reminded Members, that whilst this report focussed on the government funding received in supporting the Council's response to COVID19 she also wanted to place on record her thanks to all staff who have over the last year have been outstanding in ensuring our most vulnerable individuals, families and children have been supported.

Decision

1. That the report be noted.

2. That the Committee's comments be shared with staff.

104. General Enforcement Policy (*Chief Solicitor and Director of Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services*)

Type of decision

Non-key Decision.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to seek approval of a General Enforcement Policy, as submitted, which sets out the approach of Hartlepool Borough Council towards enforcement.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services reported that a over-arching General Enforcement Policy had been drafted in line with these principles, and aimed to ensure all enforcement:

- is consistent, transparent, accountable, proportionate and targeted;
- is risk-based to ensure an effective use of resources;
- improves protection for the community and businesses;
- and reduces the regulatory burden on businesses.

Consultation on the policy had produced very positive feedback from the public, businesses and partners.

The Chair welcomed the policy and indicated that he also looked forward to the enforcement teams being back up to full strength in the very near future.

Decision

That the General Enforcement Policy, as submitted, be approved.

105. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

The Chairman ruled that the following item of business should be considered by the Committee as a matter of urgency in accordance with the provisions of Section 100(B) (4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 in order that the matter could be dealt with without delay.

Minute 107 - Proposed Property Purchase

106. 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 107 – Proposed Property Purchase – 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).

107. Proposed Property Purchase (*Director of Resources and Development*) 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

Key Decision – Special Urgency Notice applies.

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the purchase of a property to facilitate highways improvements.

Issue(s) for consideration

Details of the proposal and the Committee's discussions are set out in the confidential section of the minutes.

Decision

The Committee's decision is set out in the confidential section of the minutes.

The meeting concluded at 12.10 pm.

H MARTIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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