

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES COMMITTEE MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

19 OCTOBER 2021

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

Present:

Councillor: Cameron Stokell (In the Chair)

Councillors: Rob Cook, Helen Howson, Peter Jackson and Darren Price.

Also Present: Councillor Tom Feeney as substitute for Councillor Rachel Creevy in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2.
Councillor Shane Moore as substitute for Councillor Brenda Loynes in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2.

Councillor Sue Little.

Edwin Jeffries, Hartlepool Joint Trades Union Committee

Officers: Tony Hanson, Director of Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services
Kieran Bostock, Assistant Director, Place Management
Sylvia Pinkney, Assistant Director, Regulatory Services
Phil Hepburn, Enforcement and Car Parking Services Manager
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

16. Apologies for Absence

Councillors Rachel Creevy and Brenda Loynes.

17. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Sue Little, Shane Moore and Cameron Stokell declared personal interests in Minute No. 26.

18. Minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2021

Received.

19. Minutes of the meeting of the Emergency Planning Joint Committee held on 10 September 2021

Received.

20. Winter Service Plan (*Assistant Director (Place Management)*)

Type of decision

Key Decision test (i) and (ii) applies. Forward Plan Reference No. NRS05/21.

Purpose of report

To seek approval for the refreshed Council's Winter Maintenance policy.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Place Management reported on the refresh of the Council's Winter Maintenance policy. The objective of the policy was to manage procedures for dealing with winter conditions, enabling as far as reasonably practicable, the safe movement of transport across the borough. A copy of the policy was attached as an appendix to the report.

The Assistant Director indicated that there were no major changes from last year's gritting routes in response to Member questions. Members also sought clarification on the policies around the provision of salt bins and their usage. Members suggested that some additional public information needed to be issued in relation to the use of the salt bins. The problems around windblown sand on the coast road at Seaton Carew was also briefly discussed with the Assistant Director assuring Members that the road would be kept clear of any windblown sand and where resources allowed, windblown sand from other areas would be returned to the beach.

A Member highlighted concerns around the works to install a roundabout on the A179 near Hart Village to service the new housing development to the south of the road. The Assistant Director indicated that he was aware of the traffic congestion being caused by the works but it was a major project that would take some months to complete. It was hoped that the traffic management controls could be removed in the near future with traffic moving to narrow lane operation to provide the necessary safety for workers. The works would be subject to monitoring by the Council's highways officers.

The following decision was agreed without dissent.

Decision

That the Council's Winter Maintenance policy, as submitted, be approved.

21. Out of Hours Noise Service and Noise App (*Assistant Director (Regulatory Services)*)

Type of decision

Key decision (i). General Exception Notice applies.

Purpose of report

To consider the referral from Full Council on 28th January 2021 for this Committee to consider the introduction / return of the 24 hour noise monitoring service and assess the potential of the trial and evaluation of an noise app for at least one year.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Regulatory Services reported on the two aspects requested by Council at the meeting held on 28 January 2021 (minute no. 99 (2) refers).

The Assistant Director reported that the Council had never operated a 24 hour noise monitoring service but had periodically ran an out of hours service from 10.00 pm to 4.00 am during 2007 and 2008 on Friday and Saturday nights. This service was extended into 2009 until August 2013 when, due to low numbers of calls, the service was ceased as a budget saving. The current situation with noise reports was set out in the report with the Assistant Director reporting that there had been an average of 479 complaints over the past three years with only 20 of those requiring staff to undertake out of hours visits.

If Members chose to operate a 24 hour noise monitoring service it would need to be adequately staffed and resources, as such a service would require a higher level of service than the current team were able to facilitate. The Assistant Director stressed that this did not mean noise complaints were not investigated; the Council had a statutory duty to investigate such complaints but an out of hour's service was not a statutory service.

In relation to the use of a noise monitoring app, the trial of a 'Noise App' would allow an individual to record a nuisance noise on their smart phone or other mobile device and send it to the Council allowing officers to listen to it. The Noise App was essentially a diary for complainants to record and send in to the officers who are investigating their complaint.

At present noise nuisance cases are dealt with through the complainant, collecting evidence by logging information on diary sheets and through the installation of specialist noise monitoring equipment. Monitoring visits are also undertaken where the investigating officer feels they are required as part of their investigation.

The use of a noise app wouldn't replace the need for specialist noise monitoring equipment or monitoring visits as it cannot be used in court if legal action is taken. It could only be used, at best, as an additional aid to our current procedures. It would also only be available to people with a smart phone or similar device. All submitted recordings would need to be

listened to by an appropriately qualified officer and significant additional digital storage would be required for the recordings. The estimated costs of licencing a noise app was expected to be around £2000 per year, however, the additional officer time required would necessitate the need for an additional Band 10 Environmental Protection Technical Officer, as a minimum, with the likelihood that to run a 24 hours out of hours service, two further officers would likely be required.

The Chair questioned the costs of reinstating the weekend 10.00 pm to 4.00 am service. The Assistant Director indicated the costs would be around £20,000, though again there was no budget provision so Finance and Policy Committee would have to be requested to fund.

Members questioned the costings for providing the 24 hour service, particularly the post grading. The Assistant Director stated that the grading had been subject to Job Evaluation. To operate such a service two Environmental Protection Officers at Grade 12, with a Technical Support at Grade 9, would be required. The Environmental Protection Officers would need to be able to serve notices out in the community.

Members noted that Council had asked for the reinstatement of a service that it had never provided and in light of the current budgetary position of the Council, such a new level of service could not be condoned. Members considered the current approach was adequate and dealt with noise complaints promptly and effectively.

In relation to the Noise App, the Chair considered the key point was that any app could not replace the need for the use of professional equipment. Members also considered the costs of properly implementing a service using an app prohibitive and could not support its use.

The following decisions were agreed without dissent.

Decision

1. That this Committee inform Council that it had considered the introduction of a 24/7 out of hour's noise service and that Members did not support the introduction of this service due to the excessive cost and limited benefit at a time when the Authority is having to identify significant budget savings.
2. That this Committee inform Council that it had considered the trial of a Noise App for use by residents as part of the noise complaint process but did not consider it to be value for money.

22. Annual Parking Report 2020/21 (*Assistant Director (Regulatory Services)*)

Type of decision

Non Key Decision.

Purpose of report

The Traffic Management Act 2004 placed a statutory requirement for all local authorities operating Civil Parking Enforcement to produce and publish an annual parking report. The report was, therefore, submitted to Elected Members for information purposes.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Regulatory Services submitted the statutory Annual Parking Report and briefly outlined the main aspects of the report which was appended to the report.

Members queried how far an enforcement officer would go to see a ticket in a car as the most often used excuse was that a ticket had fallen onto the floor of the car. The Assistant Director stated that tickets had to be 'displayed' and officers took photographs of vehicles when issuing notices. If a member of the public produced a valid ticket, the fine could be stopped.

There was brief discussion around the provision of electric car charging pints in Council car parks, the use of the camera car and the current three hour free parking in the town centre, on which Members requested additional publicity. Members also raised concerns with beggars at parking machines, some of which were intimidating the elderly and preventing them from using the machines.

A Member raised the issue of the Council issuing permits to hotels and asked why a similar policy was not operated for Residential Care Homes to benefit visitors. The Assistant Director stated that they were allowed the same benefit and should contact the Council. Members also discussed the potential of permits for visiting tradespeople in resident parking zones. The Assistant Director indicated that an additional day permit could be obtained from the Council, for a fee.

Decision

That the report be noted.

23. Vehicle and Equipment Approvals 2022/2023 to 2024/2025 *(Assistant Director (Place Management))*

Type of decision

Key Decision. Forward Plan reference NRS04/21.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to:

- i) Provide an update on vehicle purchases made in 2020/21.
- ii) Provide an update of the vehicle replacement budget for the current financial year, including vehicles purchases re-phased from previous years.
- iii) Propose the vehicle and associated equipment replacement programme for the 3 year period covering 2022/23 to 2024/25.
- iv) To request that Finance and Policy Committee be recommended that the approval for borrowing to fund the related capital expenditure be included in the 2022/23 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to be submitted to full Council.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Place Management submitted the proposed vehicle replacement programme for the next three financial years so that the appropriate borrowing requirement could be included in the MTFS. The Assistant Director stated that the submitted programme did not mean that all the vehicles would be replaced as per the schedule, only that sufficient borrowing was available should the vehicles need to be replaced. All vehicles would only be replaced when they reached the end of their serviceable life or the costs of repair became uneconomic.

The Chair questioned if in light of the Council's current economic situation this was the best approach to the council's fleet. The Assistant Director stated that leasing had been examined but purchasing had been proved to be more economical as assets could be 'sweated' to gain the maximum from them. A Member questioned the servicing regime some vehicles, particularly larger vehicles such as busses and refuse collectors. The Assistant Director assured Members all vehicles were subject to all the appropriate statutory checks and regular maintenance and inspection.

A Member questioned the purchase of new diesel vehicles with the move to electrification. The Assistant Director stated that the majority of larger vehicles were only available with diesel engines. Members questioned purchase routes and the potential of working with other authorities. The Assistant Director stated that NEPO or the most cost efficient purchase route was used.

The Director of Neighbourhood and Regulatory Services re-stated that the attached programme did not mean all those vehicles would be purchased but the flexibility to bring forward purchases as they were needed was required to ensure essential services were maintained. Members debated the potential of only approving a shorter term programme at this stage. Members understood the proposal for a three year plan but agreed that only the first year purchase programme should be approved at this time. Members requested that Finance and Policy Committee be informed that Members were conscious of the size of the programme and the borrowing

requirement. Members also asked that future year's reports include an indicative re-sale value for each vehicle.

Members indicated to the Chair a wish to discuss the not for publication appendices to the report. The meeting, therefore, moved into closed session.

Decision

The decisions of the Committee are set out below in Minute No. 25.

24. 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 25 – Vehicle and Equipment Approvals 2022/2023 to 2024/2025 – 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 in).

Minute 26 – Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2022/23 TO 2024/25 – Issues Referred From Finance and Policy Committee - 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 1) Information relating to any individual and (Para 2) Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.

25. Vehicle and Equipment Approvals 2022/2023 to 2024/2025 *(Assistant Director (Place Management))* 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. Forward Plan reference NRS04/21.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to:

- i) Provide an update on vehicle purchases made in 2020/21.
- ii) Provide an update of the vehicle replacement budget for the current financial year, including vehicles purchases re-phased from previous years.
- iii) Propose the vehicle and associated equipment replacement programme for the 3 year period covering 2022/23 to 2024/25.
- iv) To request that Finance and Policy Committee be recommended that the approval for borrowing to fund the related capital expenditure be included in the 2022/23 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to be submitted to full Council.

Issue(s) for consideration

Members discussed a number of the specific vehicles listed in the appendix to the report. With reference to the move towards electric vehicles, the Director stated that the Council was testing an electric option for small vans but there was the issue of the charging points required for such vehicles. This was a national issue as well as local. Presently the price premium in the current market for electric vehicles was also an issue.

On the recent purchase of buses, Members were informed that second-hand vehicles had been bought which were then fitted out to meet the new regulations. This was now, however, not such a financially viable option as the prices in the second-hand market had risen significantly.

Members sought reassurance from officers that vehicles were only replaced as and when it was really necessary. The Director gave that assurance indicating that this approach to vehicle purchasing had produced for the Council £500,000 of savings. Members sought assurance that when new vehicles were bought, the appropriate updated training was provided for staff to ensure they could maintain the new vehicles. The Director assured Members this was always the case.

Decision

- i) The Committee noted the updated position for vehicle purchases as of 2020/21 as set out in Appendix A, and the list for 2021/22 as set out in Appendix B. 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 in).
- ii) The Committee approved the proposed replacement programme of vehicles, heavy plant and associated equipment for 2022/23 only as set out in Appendix C and the related borrowing approvals set out in the report, and that this be referred to Finance and Policy Committee to recommend to Council as part of the 2022/2023 MTFS. 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 in).

26. Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2022/23 TO 2024/25 – Issues Referred From Finance and Policy Committee (*Director of Neighbourhood and Regulatory 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's 1 & 2)

Type of decision

Budget and Policy Framework.

Purpose of report

The purposes of the report were to enable Members to consider the savings proposals referred from Finance and Policy Committee and to determine the feedback they wish to refer back to Finance and Policy Committee.

Issue(s) for consideration

Members noted the details set out in the open section of the report. The Committee agreed to move into closed session to consider the detailed saving proposals as set out in the exempt appendices 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 1) Information relating to any individual and (Para 2) Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.

Decision

Details of the Committee's recommendations are set out in the exempt section of the minutes.

27. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

None.

The Committee noted that the next meeting was scheduled to be held on Tuesday 18 November 2021, though the Chair advised this date may be amended in the near future and Members would be advised accordingly.

The meeting concluded at 12.48 pm.

H MARTIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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