

# **FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD**

15 NOVEMBER 2021

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

**Present:**

Councillor Shane Moore (In the Chair)

Councillors: Paddy Brown, Tim Fleming, Brenda Harrison, Jim Lindridge, Sue Little, David Nicholson, Amy Prince, Cameron Stokell and Mike Young.

Also Present: Councillor Pamela Hargreaves as substitute for Councillor Jonathan Brash in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2.

Officers: Denise McGuckin, Managing Director  
Hayley Martin, Chief Solicitor  
James Magog, Assistant Director, Finance  
Paul Taylor, Strategic Development and Sustainability Manager  
Sally Robinson, Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services  
Danielle Swainston, Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning  
Penny Thompson, Head of Housing, Hardship and Welfare Services  
Tony Hanson, Director of Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services  
Steve Hilton, Communications and Marketing Team  
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

## **45. Apologies for Absence**

Councillors Jonathan Brash.

## **46. Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Amy Prince declared a personal interest in Minute No. 51.

## **47. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2021**

Received.

## **48. Minutes of the meeting of the Safer Hartlepool Partnership held on 19 July 2021**

Received.

**49. Minutes of the meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board held on 26 July 2021**

Received.

**50. Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy** (*Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*)

**Type of decision**

Key decision, test (ii) – Forward Plan Ref. CJCS 110/21

**Purpose of report**

To present the revised 'Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-24' which includes comments received during the consultation process. To advise members of the results of the consultation process. To propose that the strategy is approved in order that actions outlined in the strategy can begin

**Issue(s) for consideration**

The Head of Housing, Hardship and Welfare Services reported that at the meeting on 13 September 2021 a draft 'Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy' was presented for consideration and opened up for public for consultation. A total 38 responses were received to the consultation, including 15 members of the Homelessness Prevention Partnership, 13 directly to the Head of Service and 10 via the web link. Responses were received from social landlords, mental health, police, housing advice agencies, specialist support providers and council staff / departments.

An outline of the comments received was set out the report together with the additional actions arising from the comments that were proposed for the strategy.

Concern was raised by a number of Members, including the Chair, at the inclusion in the strategy of a proposal to "undertake research into the value of a landlord accreditation scheme with a view to improvements to the private rented sector where needed". Council had at its meeting on 30 September referred for consideration the issue of compulsory landlord registration to the Audit and Governance Committee. The Chair added that the past voluntary selective licensing schemes had proven to be wholly unsuccessful and was why the schemes were ceased.

There was extended debate around the issue of a compulsory landlord accreditation scheme. With the inclusion of the proposal within the Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy, Members questioned if there was some additional resource within the department to

undertake the work rather than await a report from the Audit and Governance Committee and if a compulsory scheme would help improve the quality of private sector rented accommodation and reduce homelessness. Officers stated that it may but wanted to explore that further, there was, however, no resource identified at this time to undertake that assessment. If that work was to be undertaken by The Audit and Governance Committee then the recommendations of that could be fed into the strategy at the appropriate time.

Members agreed after much debate to amend the reference to landlord accreditation to allow the Audit and Governance Committee to complete its work in accordance with the wishes of Council and to accommodate any recommendations at a future date if necessary.

The meeting also discussed the numbers of people rough sleeping and presenting as homeless before and after the Covid-19 pandemic. Officers referenced the three-year funding for emergency support that had been gained through a bidding process and indicated that the numbers of rough sleepers had gone up in recent years and often numbered over ten in Hartlepool. The work undertaken with the Joseph Rowntree Trust was also highlighted.

### **Decision**

That subject to the reference to landlord accreditation being amended to reflect that this work was being undertaken by the Audit and Governance Committee, the homelessness reduction and rough sleeping strategy be approved.

## **51. Household Support Fund** (*Director of Children and Joint Commissioning Services and Director of Resources and Development*)

### **Type of decision**

Key Decision (test (i)/(ii) apply) General Exception Notice applied.

### **Purpose of report**

To present details of the Government's Household Support Fund and outline proposals to commit this funding to support those in greatest need of assistance.

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

The Director of Children and Joint Commissioning Services reported that on 30 September 2021, the Government announced its allocation of £500m to support vulnerable households to help them with essentials over the coming months as the country continues its recovery from the pandemic. The Household Support Fund (HSF) covers the period 06 October 2021 to 31 March 2022 inclusive. On 07 October 2021, the Council received formal

notification of the arrangements for the administration of the HSF including draft guidance, grant determination and delivery plan templates. Hartlepool Borough Council has been allocated an indicative grant of £993,021.25.

This grant differs from the previously administered Covid Winter Support Grant and Covid Local Support Grant in that the reach is aimed at a wider number of vulnerable households, nevertheless, there is still a requirement to ensure that at least 50% of the grant is spent on children. Councils are expected to reach a broad spectrum of households, not just those on benefits.

Officers have explored the available options to maximise the impact of this grant to support vulnerable households in Hartlepool. This has included considering what support can be delivered using Local Council Tax Support or other benefit entitlement, free school meal vouchers, support through voluntary and community sector organisations and the Local Welfare Support Scheme. The Director highlighted that the administration of such a large grant poses significant challenges to the capacity and workload of the local authority.

It is proposed that the grant is distributed by the following means (the rationale behind each was set out in the report);

<b>Organisation/Scheme</b>	<b>Allocation</b>
Support for Families	£640,000
Local Welfare Support Scheme	£80,000
Housing Advice Team	£60,000
Support for Individuals (inc. Pensioners) in receipt of benefit (LCTS or UC)	£50,000
Hartlepool Food Bank	£10,000
The Bread and Butter Thing	£10,000
Citizen's Advice Bureau	£40,000
Advice at Hart	£40,000
Anglian Water	£15,000
HBC Grant administration	£48,021
<b>Total</b>	<b>£993,021</b>

Having considered the range of options for the provision of food for families with children, there is no one model that officers consider offers an accessible, easy to use and effective scheme. The Director, therefore, sought Members' instructions on the two options for consideration.

Option 1 - Purchase of supermarket voucher codes through Edenred, an online food voucher platform that had been used by schools and the Council to deliver the free school meals schemes during the Covid pandemic.

Option 2 - Purchase of pre-loaded supermarket cards to be spent in stores on food.

The Director stated that, on balance, officers supported Option 2 as it was the easier option to administer, and the Director indicated, that since the report had been produced, the scheme would not be limited to Morrison's supermarket but would also be available through Tesco and Tesco Local stores. In response to Members questions, the Director stated that the scheme would not extend to Morrison's Local stores, but officers had been able to negotiate with the provider of the cards that any unspent value on the cards after their expiration date would be returned to the local authority to be reused.

Members' broadly supported the proposed scheme as submitted and Option 2 – the use of pre-loaded supermarket cards but were concerned at the limited range of retailers and the lack of any 'discount' food retailers in the scheme. The Director stated that feedback from the previous Covid scheme from parents was that the paper voucher scheme did negatively 'mark them out' at the checkout, where using a card did not. Other supermarkets could also use an electronic scheme but that relied on users having a smart phone as well. Operating the voucher scheme would mean more retailers could be used but the workload was simply beyond the ability of the department to provide and schools would not issue the vouchers either. The pre-paid card scheme also allowed the return of unused credit to the scheme.

Members supported the proposal and Option 2 and thanked officers for the work that had gone into developing the scheme in such a short time frame. There was some concern expressed at the potential for alcohol to be purchased with the cards and the fact that a far greater level of financial support was probably needed within the community than allocated by government. The Director highlighted that there was a wide range of other activities around the food programme at Christmas that would supply wider support for those families in need. Members requested a report evaluating the scheme at its conclusion.

The Chair added a further recommendation to the report seeking Members' approval to a delegation to the Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services in consultation with the Committee Chair to re-allocate funds across the various component parts of the scheme if necessary and that any changes would be reported to Members.

The following decision was agreed without dissent.

### **Decision**

1. That the proposals set out in the report for the expenditure of the Household Support Fund grant from central government be approved including the selection of Option 2 for the provision of food for families with children.

2. That the Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services in consultation with the Chair, be authorised to re allocate funds across the various component parts of the scheme, as reported, if necessary and that any changes be reported back to this Committee.

## **52. Hartlepool Town Masterplan** (*Director of Resources and Development*)

### **Type of decision**

Key Decision test's (i) and (ii) apply. Forward Plan Reference No. CE76/21.

### **Purpose of report**

The purpose of the report was to seek approval from the Committee for the Hartlepool Town Centre Masterplan, which following the securing of £25m Towns Deal Funding, sets out a framework to reshape the town centre through individual projects and interventions.

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

The Managing Director outlined the background to the development and need for the Town Masterplan which would provide a strong strategic vision that recognised the need for both public and private sector investment to address some of the larger structural issues that were present in the town.

The Director introduced Paul Taylor, the Strategic Development and Sustainability Manager who had joined the authority recently and had been working on the development of the masterplan.

The Managing Director stated that there was to be a full presentation of all aspects of the masterplan at a Members' seminar later in the day. A copy of the large scale document would also be placed in the Members' Library.

It was hoped that having such a strategic plan in place would greatly assist in the development and presentation of future funding bids for investment into Hartlepool. The Chair added that the masterplan had been developed prior to the submission of the recent Levelling-Up bid to government. The Chair commented that there were parts of the masterplan that had to be seen as aspirational, issues such as the new bridge at the rail station, and may potentially need to be removed from the plan.

Members welcomed the masterplan and commended officers on the work undertaken in its development. There was concern that investment should not be spread too thinly across the town centre. The Managing Director agreed but stated that the Council didn't need to do it all. The investment in Church Street was already kick-starting private sector investment in the area.

The Managing Director gave the meeting an update on the progress of the discussions with Hartlepool United FC on their aspirations for the redevelopment of the Mill House and surrounding area and the development of a masterplan for that area.

Members commented that much did depend on the public perception of what was being delivered and the capital money being invested and much relied on positive messages being delivered to the public when significant revenue budget cuts were also having to be made.

### **Decision**

That the Town Centre Masterplan, as submitted, be approved.

## **53. Hartlepool Power Stations Off-Site Emergency Response Plan** *(Director of Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services)*

### **Type of decision**

For information only.

### **Purpose of report**

To update Members on the completion of the Hartlepool Nuclear Power Station's Off-Site Emergency Response Plan following delays due to the COVID-19 response last year.

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

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services reported that the Committee had previously received a report on the updated Radiation Emergency Preparedness and Public Information Regulations (REPPIR) 2019 and the subsequent changes in the distance for the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ) around the Power Station. The Distance has changed from the 1km previously to a minimum of 2km, and the updated map is included at Appendix 1 to the report. The report included the actions taken since the previous report in compliance with the updated REPPIR 2019 Regulations. A test of the plan had been scheduled for May 2022.

### **Decision**

1. The Committee noted the completion of the Off-Site Emergency Response Plan and the proposed date for the next test of this in May 2022, subject to confirmation from ONR.
2. The Committee noted the extension of the DEPZ and the provision and publication on the Council's website of prior information to businesses and residents.

**54. Council Plan 2021-2024 – Progress Update** *(Managing Director)*

**Type of decision**

For information only.

**Purpose of report**

To provide an update to Finance and Policy Committee on the progress made on the delivery of the Council Plan.

**Issue(s) for consideration**

The Managing Director provided Members with an update on the progress in delivering the key elements of the Council Plan highlighting a number of aspects for Members' information. Members welcomed the report and the Chair commented that it was easy to forget how far the authority had come following the Covid-19 pandemic and the very positive schemes it had delivered. A Member supported the Chair's comments and indicated that often people needed to be reminded of the positive action and services that were being delivered into the community and that officers across the authority should be thanked for continuing to do that, and often going beyond that during the pandemic.

**Decision**

The Committee noted the progress made on the Council Plan 2021-2024.

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

None.

The Committee noted the next meeting would be held on Monday 13 December commencing at 10.00 am in the Civic Centre.

The meeting concluded at 11.35 am.

**H MARTIN**

**CHIEF SOLICITOR**

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