



Civic Centre
HARTLEPOOL

14 March, 2022

Councillors Ashton, Boddy, Brash, Brown, Cassidy, Clayton, Cook, Cowie, Cranney, Creevy, Elliott, Falconer, Feeney, Fleming, Groves, Hall, Hargreaves, Harrison, Howson, Jackson, Lindridge, Little, D Loynes, Moore, D Nicholson, V Nicholson, Picton, Price, Prince, Richardson, Riddle, Smith, Stokell, Tiplady and Young.

Madam or Sir,

You are hereby summoned to attend the COUNCIL meeting to be held on THURSDAY, 24 MARCH 2022 at 6.00 p.m. in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool to consider the subjects set out in the attached agenda.

Yours faithfully

D McGuckin
Managing Director

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COUNCIL AGENDA



Thursday 24 March 2022

at 6.00 pm

**in the Council Chamber,
Civic Centre, Hartlepool.**

- (1) To receive apologies from absent Members;
- (2) To receive any declarations of interest from Members;
- (3) To deal with any business required by statute to be done before any other business;
- (4) To approve the minutes of the last meeting of the Council held on 24 February 2022 as the correct record
- (5) To answer questions from Members of the Council on the minutes of the last meeting of Council;
- (6) To deal with any business required by statute to be done;
- (7) To receive any announcements from the Chair, or the Head of Paid Service;
- (8) To dispose of business (if any) remaining from the last meeting and to receive the report of any Committee to which such business was referred for consideration;
- (9) To consider reports from the Council's Committees and to receive questions and answers on any of those reports;
- (10) To consider any other business specified in the summons to the meeting, and to receive questions and answers on any of those items;
- (11) To consider reports from the Policy Committees:
 - (a) proposals in relation to the Council's approved budget and policy framework; and

CIVIC CENTRE EVACUATION AND ASSEMBLY PROCEDURE

In the event of a fire alarm or a bomb alarm, please leave by the nearest emergency exit as directed by Council Officers. A Fire Alarm is a continuous ringing. A Bomb Alarm is a continuous tone. The Assembly Point for everyone is Victory Square by the Cenotaph. If the meeting has to be evacuated, please proceed to the Assembly Point so that you can be safely accounted for.

- (b) proposals for departures from the approved budget and policy framework;
- (12) To consider motions in the order in which notice has been received;
- (13) To receive the Managing Director's report and to pass such resolutions thereon as may be deemed necessary;
- (14) To receive questions from and provide answers to the public in relation to matters of which notice has been given under Rule 9;
- (15) To answer questions of Members of the Council under Rule 10;
 - a) Questions to the Chairs about recent decisions of Council Committees and Forums without notice under Council Procedure Rule 10.1
 - b) Questions on notice to the Chair of any Committee or Forum under Council Procedure Rule 10.2
 - c) Questions on notice to the Council representatives on the Police and Crime Panel and Cleveland Fire Authority
 - d) Minutes of the meetings held by the Cleveland Fire Authority on 10 December 2021.



COUNCIL

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

24 February 2022

The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm in the Mill House Leisure Centre

The Deputy Ceremonial Mayor (Councillor Cook) presiding:

COUNCILLORS:

Ashton	Boddy	Brash
Brown	Clayton	Cranney
Creevy	Elliott	Falconer
Feeney	Fleming	Groves
Hall	Hargreaves	Harrison
Howson	Jackson	Lindridge
Little	Moore	D Nicholson
V Nicholson	Picton	Price
Smith	Stokell	Young

Officers: Denise McGuckin, Managing Director
Hayley Martin, Chief Solicitor
Chris Little, Director of Resources and Development
Ed Turner, Steve Hilton, Communications and Marketing Team
Amanda Whitaker, David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

Prior to the commencement of the meeting the Deputy Ceremonial Mayor referred to the recent deaths of former Councillors, Kevin Kelly and Brenda Pearson. Members stood in silence as a mark of respect

Terms of regret were expressed by the Deputy Ceremonial Mayor in relation to the recent death of the Ceremonial Mayor, Councillor Brenda Loynes. A letter which had been received from Mrs Sue Snowdon, Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of County Durham, was read out by the Deputy Ceremonial Mayor. Elected Members paid tribute to her qualities as a Councillor, mentor and as a friend.

78. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENT MEMBERS

Councillors Cassidy, Cowie, D Loynes, Prince, Richardson and Riddle

79. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

None

80. BUSINESS REQUIRED BY STATUTE TO BE DONE BEFORE ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None

81. MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

The Minutes of Proceedings of the Council held on the 16 December 2021, having been laid before the Council.

RESOLVED - That the minutes be confirmed.

82. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL ON THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

With reference to minute 75, an elected member advised Full Council that he had received information from the Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services in relation to his request for clarification regarding delivery of the Contextual Safeguarding Hub. Whilst thanking the Director for the response, the elected member advised that he would be further reassured to know if there were any young people on register due to contextual abuse. The Managing Director undertook to refer to the Director for a further response.

83. BUSINESS REQUIRED BY STATUTE

None

84. ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

85. TO DISPOSE OF BUSINESS (IF ANY) REMAINING FROM THE LAST MEETING AND TO RECEIVE THE REPORT OF ANY COMMITTEE TO WHICH SUCH BUSINESS WAS REFERRED FOR CONSIDERATION.

- (1) Periodic Review of the Council's Constitution – Report of the Constitution Committee.

In accordance with Rule 22.2 of the Council Procedure Rules, the proposed changes to the Council Procedure Rules recommended by the Constitution Committee had stood adjourned since the meeting of Full Council on the 16 December 2021. The Committee had made a number of recommendations in relation to the Council Procedure Rules which were set out in the report as

follows:-

- That provision be included in the Council Procedure Rules to set out that the public may ask questions at Policy committee meetings in relation to the items on the agenda with a time limit of 4 minutes to include asking and responding to the question.
- That Rule 9.7 be amended to a questioner may ask 'up to two supplementary questions without notice for clarification purposes. The supplementary question must arise directly from the original question or reply.
- That the member of the public be given the choice to read out their own question or allow the Managing Director to read out the question.

The recommendations of the Committee were agreed, with no dissent.

86. TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES

None

87. TO CONSIDER ANY OTHER BUSINESS SPECIFIED IN THE SUMMONS OF THE MEETING

None

88. REPORT FROM THE POLICY COMMITTEES

(a) Proposal in relation to the Council's budget and policy framework

- (1) Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2022/23 - Statutory Budget and Council Tax Determination – Report of Finance and Policy Committee

The Chair of the Finance and Policy Committee presented the report which provided details of the final 2022/23 Local Government Finance settlement announcement. Comprehensive reports had been submitted to Full Council on 30 September 2021 and 16 December 2021. The report reminded elected members of the decisions made at those meetings and provided an update on the issues considered by Finance and Policy Committee on 14th February 2022.

The report also enabled Elected Members to finalise the 2022/23 technical Council Tax calculations, which incorporated Council Tax levels independently set by precepting bodies.

The following recommendations had been referred by Finance and Policy Committee for Full Council approval:

- i) Note that in accordance with the recommendation approved by Finance and Policy Committee (13.12.21) and Council (16.12.21) the

additional funding of £1.484m confirmed in the final Local Government Finance settlement (07.02.22) will reduce the use of the Budget Support Fund in 2022/23, which reduces the deficit deferred from 2022/23 to 2023/24; and reduces the total 2022/23 and 2024/25 forecast deficit from £4.4m to £2.9m – thereby providing a more robust and sustainable MTFS;

- ii) Approve the following amendments to the approved 2022/23 savings, which will need to be funded by increasing use of the Budget Support Fund:
 - Defer the Local Welfare Support saving - £86,000
 - Remove the School Crossing Patrols saving - £32,000 and note that officers be requested to determine if on an “invest to save basis” either pelican or zebra crossings, with 20 mph zones, can be installed and report details of the business case to a future meeting of Finance and Policy Committee.
- iii) Approve the capital schemes and Prudential borrowing requirements in Annex 1 - Appendix B, which includes the proposals in relation to investment in the Cremators and the START Service;
- iv) Approve that in line with the policy adopted in previous years to delegate authority to the relevant Policy Committee to determine, in compliance with the relevant grant conditions, the allocation of the actual capital grants once these are known.

Statutory Council Tax calculations

- i) Approve the statutory budget calculation for the Council budget as detailed in Appendix A and approve the detailed supporting departmental budgets detailed the separate booklet circulated with the agenda;
- ii) Approve the statutory Council Tax calculations detailed in Appendix A, which includes the Council Tax increases approved by the individual precepting bodies.

The recommendations of the Committee were moved by Councillor Moore and seconded by Councillor Young.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.6 of the Constitution, a recorded vote was taken on recommendations i), ii), iii) and iv):-

Those for:-

Councillors Ashton, Brown, Cook, Cranney, Falconer, Fleming, Groves, Jackson, Lindridge, Little, Moore, D Nicholson, V Nicholson, Picton, Price, Smith, Stokell and Young.

Those against:-

Councillors Boddy, Brash, Clayton, Creevy, Elliot, Feeney, Hall, Hargreaves, Harrison and Howson.

Those abstaining:-

None

It was announced that the vote was carried.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.6 of the Constitution, a recorded vote was taken on recommendations statutory council tax calculations:-

Those for:-

Councillors Ashton, Brown, Cook, Cranney, Falconer, Fleming, Groves, Jackson, Lindridge, Little, Moore, D Nicholson, V Nicholson, Picton, Price, Smith, Stokell and Young.

Those against:-

Councillors Boddy, Brash, Clayton, Creevy, Elliot, Feeney, Hall, Hargreaves, Harrison and Howson.

Those abstaining:-

None

It was announced that the vote was carried.

(2) Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan Update – Report of Finance and Policy Committee

The report enabled Full Council to consider the recommendations from the Finance and Policy Committee in relation to HRA rent levels for 2022/23 and the HRA Investment Programme. A HRA Business Plan report had been considered by Finance and Policy Committee on 14th February 2022, as set out in Annex A, and covered the following two areas:

- Rent Level 2022/23 - The report recommended that a 4.1% increase provided the most robust basis for the HRA in 2022/23 and beyond. Without this increase rental income would not be sufficient to cover expenditure and this would result in HRA reserves reducing which would not be sustainable.
- HRA Investment Programme - Current approved schemes aimed to increase the number of properties from 305 to 406. This investment would be funded from a combination of capital grants / section 106 contribution, which would fund 38% of capital costs, and Prudential Borrowing which would be repaid

from rental income. The report sought approval of the proposed capital budget and Prudential Borrowing to fund this investment.

The following recommendations had been referred by the Committee for approval:-

- (1) Approve the recommended rent increase for 2022/23 of 4.1%.
- (2) Approve the proposed capital budget set out in ANNEX A **CONFIDENTIAL APPENDIX 2 which 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).** It was noted that once each phase was approved details of the agreed budgets would be reported to Finance and Policy Committee as part of the publically available information.

When presenting the report the Chair of Finance and Policy Committee indicated that the rent increase was needed to sustain the HRA and support further capital investment.

The recommendations of the Committee were moved by Councillor Moore and seconded by Councillor Young.

Elected members debated issues arising from the report during which concerns were expressed regarding the timing of the recommended rent increase and the impact on households. A register of landlords was suggested to address the issues highlighted regarding substandard accommodation.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.6 of the Constitution, a recorded vote was taken on the recommendations of the Committee:-

Those for:-

Councillors Ashton, Brown, Cook, Cranney, Falconer, Fleming, Groves, Jackson, Lindridge, Little, Moore, D Nicholson, V Nicholson, Stokell and Young.

Those against:-

Councillors Boddy, Brash, Clayton, Creevy, Elliot, Feeney, Hall, Hargreaves, Harrison, Howson, Picton, Price and Smith.

Those abstaining:-

None

It was announced that the vote was carried.

- (b) Proposal for Departure from the Budget and Policy Framework

None

89. MOTIONS ON NOTICE

Two Motions had been received as follows:-

1.

“Politics is about choice and choice is about priorities. The Labour Group believes there is no higher priority than our children’s safety and we believe the decision taken by the ruling coalition to cut school crossing patrol puts the lives of our young people in danger.

Furthermore, given the cost of living crisis we believe that we must maximise the funding that goes to supporting families in financial need, via local welfare support. Council therefore resolves to supplement the local welfare support fund with the £32k earmarked for school crossings by Finance and Policy and pay for the crossings by cutting special allowances. We can provide more support for families and keep school crossings by cutting special allowances.

We therefore move that the council resolves to reduce special responsibility allowances, with the exception of the council leader, by 50% immediately and that this money, equating to £33k, should be used to reverse the cuts to our school crossing patrols.

Therefore, we further resolve to refer this saving to a special meeting of Finance and Policy Committee (and Full Council should the Committee recommend use of the saving), to be held no later than March 10th 2022 and outside school hours to facilitate the attendance of school representatives and parents, where consideration can be given to using the saving to reverse the cut to our school crossing patrols.”

Signed: Councillors Harrison, Brash, Hargreaves, Clayton, Feeney, Boddy, Creevy, Elliott, Prince, Richardson and Howson.

Councillor Brash addressed Full Council and advised that on reflection, the Labour Group had advised the Director of Resources and Development that the Group, which receives one special responsibility allowance, would revoke that allowance and any future labour chairs of Committees would receive 50% of the special responsibility allowance.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11.3, the Motion was withdrawn.

2.

“That Full Council agree to write to Jill Mortimer MP to request her support in lobbying Parliament for Local Authorities to be given more powers to take control of derelict buildings and sites that ruin our communities and stifle economic growth.”

Signed: Councillors Moore, Brown, Stokell, Groves, Jackson, Cranney and Cowie

The Motion was moved by Councillor Moore and seconded by Councillor Hargreaves.

On seconding the Motion, Councillor Hargreaves suggested that the letter include the signatures of all elected members.

Elected members debated issues arising from the Motion. It was suggested that the letter to the MP include a list of all buildings and sites and that a letter be also forwarded to the appropriate Minister to include suggested removal of tax benefits from undeveloped land. It was further suggested that the Register of empty properties, derelict buildings and sites be shared with Elected Members on a quarterly basis and to be the subject of next scheduled Members' Seminar.

The mover of the Motion advised Full Council that he accepted all the suggestions which had been made.

The Motion, with additional suggestions, was agreed unanimously by show of hands.

MANAGING DIRECTOR'S REPORT

90. CLEVELAND POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

The Managing Director reported that she had received notification that Councillor Picton had resigned from the Cleveland Police and Crime Panel. A nomination for a replacement elected member was sought.

RESOLVED – That Councillor Moore be appointed to replace Councillor Picton on the Cleveland Police and Crime Panel.

91. SPECIAL URGENCY DECISIONS

In accordance with the requirements of the Access to Information Procedure Rules included in the Council's Constitution, Full Council was informed that one special urgency decision had been taken in the period November 2021 – January 2022. The decision, as set out in the report, related to specialist external support required to provide Project Management and Technical Advisory Services to deliver five Green Book compliant business cases and further assessment of project viability for each of the projects in the Council's £25m Towns Fund programme.

Following presentation of the report, concern was expressed at delays in publication of Officer Delegated decision Records. The Managing Director

undertook to arrange for procedures to be reviewed with a view to improve the process.

RESOLVED – That the decision be noted.

92. COVID UPDATE

The Managing Director updated Full Council on the coronavirus position in Hartlepool. A further update was tabled at the meeting which followed the Prime Ministers announcement on 21st February, 2022 and the publication of the Governments “COVID 19 Response: Living with Covid -19”. The document set out how the Government will ensure resilience, maintaining contingency capabilities to deal with a range of possible scenarios. A summary was presented of the key points and the key challenges arising from this next phase of the COVID_19 response. The Managing Director undertook to update elected members again when further information was received.

Elected Members requested further communications be issued clarifying the current position and changes to regulations. In response to an issue raised at the meeting, the Managing Director undertook to speak to the Director of Public Health to clarify the situation around vaccinations for children at vaccination centres.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

93. NET ZERO AND CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY

The Managing Director reported that Finance and Policy Committee, on 13th December 2021, had considered and approved a proposal to develop a Net Zero and Climate change plan by 2022. This had been in response to a Motion considered by Full Council on 30 July 2020 which had been referred to Finance and Policy Committee for consideration.

The report set out a proposed timetable between now and September 2022 which would see the development of the Council's first Net Zero Plan and the commitments identified as ‘early wins’ to be implemented. The Committee had discussed the proposed Declaration of a ‘Climate Emergency’. Whilst support was expressed for such a Declaration, the majority of Committee members agreed it would be more appropriate for the Communications Team to consider a suitable wording for a local launch initiative early in 2022.

It was highlighted that the reference to considering climate change issues when reviewing policies, should be included in the remit of all Policy Committees. This issue is reflected within the constitution and can be implemented along with relevant guidance.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

94. LEVELLING UP BID FEEDBACK

The Managing Director advised Full Council that Officers had met with representatives from DHLUC and BEIS. Elected Members were advised of the feedback which had been received. It was noted that there had been nothing significantly wrong with the bid and if there had been adequate time and schemes had been more advanced, most of the gaps DLUCH/BEIS had identified would have been addressed..

An Elected Member suggested a Working Group to look at the next bid prior to submission. In light of the timeline for submission having not yet been set by Government, the Managing Director suggested the bid be subject to discussion at a Members' seminar.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

95. ELECTION HEARING PETITION

The Managing Director reported that a High Court hearing had been held in the Civic Centre on the 27 and 28 January to consider the petition issued by Mr Robert Buchan against Councillor Jennifer Elliott. The trial had been heard by His Honour Judge Kramer who having considered the evidence before him, gave his judgment that Councillor Jennifer Elliott had been duly elected on the 6 May 2021.

His Honour Judge Kramer had expressed his thanks for the very efficient way in which the hearing had been organised; the most marvellous Council Chamber in which to be able to deal with the hearing; and how it had been made comfortable for all. Judge Kramer felt it would be invidious to single anyone out. Barrister Sackman did however support the Judge's comments confirming that this was Jackie Allen.

Councillor Elliott addressed Full Council and expressed her appreciation to the Officers who had been involved in the hearing and to those that had supported her throughout the process.

RESOLVED –That the report be noted.

96. PARISH LIAISON MEETINGS

It was reported that Parish liaison meetings had been reintroduced inviting all Parish Council Chairs to attend and meet with the Leader of the Council and Managing Director following a prolonged interruption. These meetings provided an equal opportunity for all the Parish Chairs to share their aspirations and/or concerns and for the Council to update on issues of interest to the Parish Councils and on HBC key deliverables.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

97. QUEENS PLATINUM JUBILEE – A YEAR OF CELEBRATION

The Managing Director reminded Full Council that 2022 marks 70 years of the Queen's reign as Monarch, national Jubilee celebrations would be held typically in June 2022 however Hartlepool plans to host a year of celebrations interacting with local heritage, education, community and businesses. A book of commemoration would be opened in February and a range of events and campaigns would provide opportunities for Hartlepool to engage with celebrations across the year. The programme of events had been launched at Christchurch Art Gallery Saturday 5th February 2022.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

98. ELECTION CYCLE

Elected Members were reminded that at the meeting of the Constitution Committee held on 22 November 2021, it had been agreed that a recommendation be made that the election cycle be changed to whole council elections with effect from May 2024, when the term of office of all currently elected members will have expired. Full Council, at its meeting on 16 December 2021, agreed the Committee's recommendation to change to whole council elections.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011) required that Full Council pass a resolution to consult such persons as the council think appropriate (s33(2)) to move to whole council elections. The Act does not specify the form of consultation required; only that the Council determine that it is reasonable. Once consultation has been completed a special meeting of Full Council is required to be convened for a motion which must then be approved by a two thirds majority of members voting and must also specify the first year to be a whole council elections. Arrangements had been made, therefore, to undertake consultation which started on 20 December and would end on 27 February. A Special meeting of Council would be held on 24 March, immediately prior to the scheduled ordinary meeting of Full Council, to consider the outcome of the consultation.

Elected Members discussed issues arising from the consultation and asked for further communications to be issued on the consultation exercise and that, if possible, a breakdown of the demographics of those that had responded to the consultation be reported alongside the results.

RESOLVED – That a Special meeting of Council be held on 24 March, immediately prior to the scheduled ordinary meeting of Full Council.

99. PAY POLICY 2022/2023

The Managing Director reported that under Section 38 of the Localism Act (2011), Full Council has to approve a Pay Policy Statement on an annual basis. The updated document for 2022/23 was appended to the report. Full Council was requested to approve the Pay Policy Statement 2022/23

In response to an elected member's reference to recent discussion at a meeting of Finance and Policy Committee regarding the proposed changes to employee terms and conditions of employment, the Managing Director assured the member that an update on the negotiations with Trade Unions on the Terms and Conditions savings would be provided to Finance and Policy Committee.

RESOLVED – That the Pay Policy 2022/23 be approved.

100. THE COUNCIL TAX (DEMAND NOTICES AND REDUCTION SCHEMES) (ENGLAND) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2022

It was reported that the Council Tax (Demand Notices and Reduction Schemes)(England) (Amendment) Regulations 2022 had been laid before Parliament on 11 February 2022 and came into force on the 12 February 2022. These regulations covered the £150 Council Tax Energy Bills Rebate for Council tax bands A-D. The Regulations also amended the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements)(England) Regulations 2012 to require that from 1 April 2022 all Local Council Tax Support schemes must disregard Energy Bills Rebate payments in determining a person's eligibility for a Council Tax reduction and the amount of any such reduction.

Full Council had approved its Local Council Tax Support scheme on the 30 September 2021. Approval for the above amendment was now required by Full Council, in order to meet the statutory deadline of 11 March 2022.

Elected Members were advised that as soon as the detailed guidance for processing the £150 Council Tax Energy Bills Rebate for Council tax bands A-D is received, the Council would be able to commence preparations for payments to all eligible households, including households eligible for Local Council Tax Support.

RESOLVED – That the amendment was approved.

101. PUBLIC QUESTION

One question had been received from Miss Higham to Chair of Finance and Policy Committee:-

“At the time this question has been submitted to the full council, the current National Minimum Wage is £8.91 per hour for workers aged 25 & over In Hartlepool, its claimed that there are around 10,000 adult carers & approx.

2,000 young carers, many of whom claim Carers Allowance, a weekly allowance paid by the government to care givers which pays just £67.60 per week.. One of the conditions of Carers Allowance is that you must spend at least 35 hours a week caring for the person, usually a loved one, which can put an exceptional strain on a relationship. Breaking down the £67.60 per week, over 35 hours, carers in Hartlepool are receiving around £1.93 per week, against the current national minimum wage of £8.91 per hour. Most Carers who stay at home cannot take on additional employment because of the responsibilities they undertake, (after all, were already working 35 hours plus per week), with many care givers on such a severely low income, they have to rely on the support of foodbanks. Carers are three times more likely to be in debt with their accounts such as Utilities or Council Tax than any other group, & twice as likely to become the victim of loansharks... My question to the full council is that will Hartlepool Borough Council finally start to rethink its policy on Local Council Tax Support, in that carers should now be fully excluded from having to pay a shortfall in their Council Tax bills, when the responsibilities already bestowed on some carers having to look after their loved ones is such that it cannot be fair & just of a local authority to apply such a regressive , inflexible & rigorously harsh scheme towards those who are financially at rock bottom, earning just £1.93 per week caring for their loved ones Carers are the most underrepresented portion of our society after the disabled, the council must now acknowledge that as bills are going up, its piling the pressures on those already finding it hard caring for their loved ones, which sadly for some, is a strain that will become just too much to bear any longer as we move into 2022 The council now needs to look at its policy of Council Tax support to ensure that Council Tax support is actually doing what it says in the tin & not pushing those already struggling further into poverty. The scheme now needs to recognise that some groups in the town have to be taken out of this scheme altogether & made exempt. Carers should be at the top of that list.... Thank You”

The Chair of Finance and Policy Committee responded by thanking Miss Higham for her question and also expressing his appreciation of the role carers play supporting their loved ones and other people they support. The Council has maintained a 12% Local Council Tax Support Scheme for nine years as it was recognised this support is needed by many people. Whilst the Chair expressed his support for the 12% scheme it needed to be recognised that this support reduced the amount of Council Tax received to pay for vital services as fully eligible households only have to pay 12% of the Council Tax liability. The Chair considered that the existing means tested Local Council Tax Support scheme provided a fair basis for supporting households and a blanket exemption for carers would not be an appropriate or affordable way forward. Indeed, should a blanket exemption be put in place for all carers that would mean that his own household would be exempt from Council Tax and he did not consider that was appropriate. It was the understanding of the Chair that no other Tees Valley council have gone down this route and assess Local Council Tax Support on a means tested basis.

It was highlighted that the Council has always acknowledged the vital role that carers play in supporting family members or friends who have support needs and commissions carers assessment, information and support from Hartlepool Carers, which can involve practical as well as emotional support. The Council

also supports carers by providing Direct Payments that can be used innovatively by carers in ways that make it possible for them to continue in their caring role, and commissions' services that provide carers with a short break from their caring responsibilities.

As Ms Higham had been unavailable to attend the meeting, Full Council was advised that a copy of the response would be forwarded to her.

Elected Members debated issues arising from the question and suggested that the issue be referred to Committee. The Managing Director responded that she would speak to appropriate Directors as it could be possible for the Adult and Community Based Services Committee and Children's services Committee to look at the issues around support for carers and young carers in the community.

102. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

- a) Questions to the Chairs about recent decisions of Council Committees and Forums without notice under Council Procedure Rule 12.1

The Chair of Finance and Policy Committee was asked a question relating to the fairness of the proposed changes to employee terms and conditions of employment. It was highlighted that the minutes of the Committee meeting had not been published and the question should, therefore, not be put.

- b) Questions on notice to the Chair of any Committee or Forum under Council Procedure Rule 12.2

None

- c) Questions on notice to the Council representatives on the Police and Crime Panel and Cleveland Fire Authority

None

- d) Minutes of the meetings held by the Cleveland Fire Authority and the Police and Crime Panel

Minutes of the meetings held by the Cleveland Fire Authority held on 15 October 2021 and the Police and Crime Panel held on 3 November 2021 and 9 November 2021.

The meeting concluded at 7.45 p.m.

DEPUTY CEREMONIAL MAYOR

COUNCIL

24 March 2022



Report of: Managing Director

Subject: BUSINESS REPORT

1. OFSTED FOCUSED VISIT – CARE LEAVERS

To inform Members of the outcome of the Ofsted focused visit to Hartlepool Children's Services, which took place in January 2022. In January 2018, Ofsted launched a revised framework for the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) to examine the arrangements for the care and support provided by local authorities to children and young people in receipt of early help and children's social care services.

Since the implementation of the ILACS framework, Hartlepool Children's Services has been inspected on three occasions:

- Short inspection (July 2018);
- Focused visit – Children in need and children subject to a protection plan (March 2020); and
- Focused visit – Care leavers (January 2022)

The report of the focused visit was published on 22 February 2022 on the Ofsted website <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80473>. The report reflects a strong performing children's services that supports care leavers well, has continued to deliver a high quality service to care leavers despite the pandemic and created a culture where 'care leavers are always in mind and, always in reach'. The covering letter attached reflects very positively on the quality of services to care leavers in Hartlepool and is an outcome to be celebrated (**Appendix A**).

The report identifies one area for improvement where work has commenced but the inspectors were not yet able to see the impact of that in the young person's record. Senior managers are confident that as the work programme is rolled out over the next eight weeks, this area for improvement will have been addressed. Nevertheless, audit work will be completed to be assured that the voice and influence of care leavers is reflected in pathway plans.

2. MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN HBC AND JOMAST

HBC and Jomast have agreed to work together to develop options for delivering key strategic redevelopment sites involving:

- Collaborating in the development of a concept masterplan for the regeneration of waterfront/marina sites and the Wesley Chapel;
- Cooperating to develop option appraisals to outline short, medium and long term priorities, within an overall 5 year plan;
- Jointly managing the involvement and collaboration of other partners such as the NMRN, Homes England, Combined Authority and Network Rail;
- Developing and agreeing a development phase financing strategy including partner contribution; and
- Jointly prepare a vision document covering marketing, branding and publicity.

3. COVID UPDATE

At the time of writing this report we were aware of 233/100,000 COVID-19 cases in Hartlepool. Cases are increasing again nationally as are hospitalisations which is probably a result of restrictions being removed. We are seeing small increases in case numbers in Hartlepool, and as testing is no longer mandatory the testing figures for Hartlepool have reduced which means that we are likely to be underestimating the cases at the moment.

COVID-19 continues to present a risk and so there are recommendations still in place for people to follow. These include the recommendation that people continue to wear face coverings in public places where they are likely to meet people they don't know, that people who have symptoms or test positive should self-isolate and that people should continue to test regularly.

The vaccination programme is continuing and we are encouraging all residents to book their first, second or booster doses.

The percentage of people who have had a vaccination in Hartlepool are:

1st Dose: 83%

2nd Dose: 80%

Booster: 62% (total population not eligible population)

We expect to see a spring booster programme coming on line shortly for people aged 75 years and older, residents in care homes for older people, and those with weakened immune systems.

COVID-19 remains a Health and Safety RIDDOR reportable incident in the workplace until 1st April, therefore it is important we continue to provide advice and guidance to all employees. It is equally important that we transition back to a workforce model that has a physical office presence at its heart and it is expected that employees will return to workplaces the week commencing Monday 4th April 2022.

HBC will move towards a pilot hybrid working model for those services which can and this will take place from Monday 4th April for a period of six months. This will help us to manage the transition back into offices, whilst we review and consider our longer term models of work in line with our accommodation strategy, and provide us with a good understanding of what works and what doesn't as we develop longer-term plans.

Our approach to returning to the workplace will be based on a hybrid working model, with a minimum of two days in the workplace and three days working from home being the standard for full time employees, driven by service needs. This will minimise the potential numbers of employees in the workplace at any one time, whilst also supporting the direction of travel to work more flexibly and allow us to get back in the office to interact with colleagues, working together as teams and also provide support for new employees.

4. A19 GRADE SEPARATED JUNCTION, ELWICK BYPASS AND HARTLEPOOL WESTERN LINK

An update report was considered by Finance and Policy Committee on 14th March 2022 and is attach at **Appendix B** As Members are aware the scheme is designed to address safety and capacity issues in relation to traffic movements through Elwick village. It was always recognised that delivery of this scheme would be challenging as the Council needs to work with external organisations owing to land acquisition issues and highways issues regarding linking the new road with the A19.

Significant progress has been made with National Highways in recent months in relation to the design of the road and how it will link into the A19. The next key step is to complete a Road Safety Audit Stage 1 (RSA 1) and submit this to National Highways for approval. It is envisaged this will take approximately 6 to 8 weeks – although this will be subject to National Highways workload and priorities. Once the RSA 1 is approved this will enable the Council to confirm the exact land requirements.

Progressing the land acquisition has been, and remains, a key priority for the Council, and although to date it has been very difficult to reach agreement with the Land Agent representing the majority of land owners, officers are continuing to pursue a negotiated settlement, as this would be beneficial to the Council in terms of saving time and costs.

Officers are also progressing all aspects of the project including those associated with the planning and land acquisition processes and will continue to work on the latter with a specialist legal practice with a view to resolving outstanding matters as quickly as possible. A further report, to Finance and Policy Committee and then Council, seeking a formal resolution to progress the CPO process will be presented to members later in the year if the ongoing land acquisition discussions do not prove successful.

22 February 2022

Sally Robinson
Director, Children's, and Joint Commissioning Services
Hartlepool Borough Council Civic Centre
Victoria Road
Hartlepool
TS24 8AY

Dear Mrs Robinson

Focused visit to Hartlepool children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the focused visit to Hartlepool children's services on 18 and 19 January 2022. Her Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Vicky Metherringham and Jo Warburton.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for care leavers.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. Inspectors were on site during the visit and carried out a combination of face-to-face and virtual meetings. Inspectors met with care leavers, personal advisers, social workers, managers and leaders.

Headline findings

Determined senior leaders ensure that care leavers are provided with consistent practical, financial and emotional support. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, care leavers have continued to experience the same high-quality service as they did prior to the pandemic. Senior leaders have created a relational approach across the whole social work system. This has created conditions for good-quality practice to grow and flourish and has created a culture where care leavers are always in mind, and always in reach.

Highly skilled and effective workers, many of whom have worked in the authority for years, have long-standing and meaningful relationships with young people. They support care leavers exceptionally well to make the transition to becoming young adults in all areas of their lives. Care leavers benefit from a 'one worker' model of practice, which enables them to develop trusting relationships with workers and foster carers. 'Staying put' is actively encouraged and other accommodation options are explored with care leavers at their pace, and only when they are ready to move to independence. Strong agency partnerships, and a highly effective virtual school, work closely with social workers, staff and carers to help care leavers access employment and training opportunities and achieve their ambitions.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice?

- The voice and influence of care leavers in developing and owning their individual pathway plan.

Main findings

COVID-19 rates in Hartlepool are consistently above the national average. At a very early stage, senior leaders made the decision that care leavers needed to be seen and supported as usual. The senior leadership team worked closely with the workforce to secure the balance between ensuring the safety and well-being of young people and that of their staff. Buildings remained open to provide face-to-face support throughout the pandemic to care leavers. Care leavers were encouraged to remain living with their foster carers and other carers during the first period of lockdown, and beyond. Leaders recognise that care leavers need the continued support of their carers, to feel safe and remain safe.

Workers know their care leavers exceptionally well. The 'one worker' model provides them with a social worker from the through care team during the time they are looked after until they no longer require a service, irrespective of their age. Care leavers spoken to during the visit told inspectors that they experience excellent support from workers in all areas of their lives. They report that they have strong and supportive relationships with workers who they feel truly care about them.

Inspectors observed persistent workers making relentless efforts to keep in touch with care leavers. They visit them frequently and according to their needs and wishes. Care leavers are seen face to face, even when they live at some distance. Workers keep in touch with care leavers using a range of methods in between face-to-face contact. They know what their rights and entitlements are and have access to an advocate from the National Youth Advocacy Service or an independent visitor if this is required.

Most assessments in pathway plans are detailed and consider all relevant issues for care leavers effectively. They provide a comprehensive range of agreed actions and timescales about when these will be completed, and by whom. Plans reflect care leavers' financial entitlements, and show that they have access to the key documents needed to begin their lives as young adults. Some plans are written to care leavers and avoid jargon, but this approach is still in its infancy. While workers can clearly articulate care leavers' views, this does not always translate into their written individual plans.

Transitions for care leavers are informed by individual assessment of their needs, undertaken by their social worker. Assessments include thoughtful consideration of accommodation needs and longer-term education or training aspirations. Social workers undertake timely work which ensures that care leavers move towards

independence at their own pace. Their transition plans are informed by a thorough understanding of care leavers' experiences and needs.

Care leavers live in a range of safe and appropriate accommodation provision which includes staying put, supported lodgings, independent tenancies and student accommodation. Their views inform where they are going to live and individualised packages of support are developed and followed through. When care leavers progress to into independent living, they see their workers frequently. Workers provide practical, financial and emotional support. This reduces the risk of their tenancies breaking down and ensures that the standards and suitability of their accommodation are continuously assessed and monitored.

Care leavers are encouraged to stay put with their foster carers, even when these arrangements incur additional financial expenditure. Committed foster carers support care leavers to be prepared well for adulthood. Foster carers are well supported with staying put agreements which provide clarity about the support that they will receive. Only a very small number of care leavers are in custody. Workers maintain regular contact with the prison service and young people to ensure that their individual needs are known and assessed, both in prison and in preparation for their release.

The numbers of care leavers engaged in education, employment and training are improving, despite the impact of the pandemic. The number of care leavers accessing university is increasing, with more being prepared to attend this year. A range of options are considered when transitioning from school, including consideration of work experience, apprenticeships, further education and university. A highly effective virtual school head promotes the engagement of care leavers' involvement in further education and training, described by some as the 'nagging parent'.

Care leavers' routine health needs are actively considered, and they are well supported by their carers and workers to attend appointments. Proactive workers support timely referrals to adult services to provide care leavers with continuity of care to maintain their health needs, particularly where they are taking medication. Care leavers report feeling well supported by their workers and foster carers when they experience low mood. The in-house therapeutic team provides filial therapy to foster carers and young people. It also provides consultation to workers and carers.

Risks to care leavers are monitored and reduced through skilful direct work and attention by their workers. Timely and appropriate referrals to other agencies are made through effective multi-agency working.

Senior leaders actively seek feedback from care leavers through the reinvigorated, enthusiastic care leavers group as well as through other methods, including a care leavers ballot. Care leavers are engaged and encouraged to attend corporate parenting panels. During the pandemic, workers continued to reach out to care leavers to provide them with gift vouchers to celebrate their success and commend

them on their achievements. A range of other creative offers of support were provided to them, to enable them to remain connected.

This visit has evidenced a strong and stable senior leadership team whose members show determination and ambition to improve care leavers' outcomes. They use highly effective performance data, which they have created, to focus on care leavers' vulnerabilities, needs and progress. They use this to scrutinise and constructively challenge frontline managers to inform improvement activity. The quality assurance framework provides senior leaders with a consistent line of sight to the quality and impact of practice. Audit and moderation processes are underpinned by a relational and supportive approach. Workers report that their practice is improving as a direct consequence of this approach.

Enthusiastic political leadership, driven by the lead member, means that care leavers are benefiting from their needs being understood and prioritised as any good parent would. Senior leaders and members are rightly very proud of the service and are determined to improve care leavers' outcomes even further. Children's services have received additional financial investment and increased worker capacity to sustain and improve high-quality support to care leavers.

Staff describe feeling valued and supported by senior leaders. Many workers have worked in the authority for many years, showing unstinting commitment to young people. This culture was palpable as inspectors spoke with staff and managers. Staff unequivocally describe visible and approachable senior leaders who communicate well with them. Staff describe their caseloads as being manageable. This assists them to support care leavers exceptionally well. Staff experience personal and case supervision which encourages reflection and a focus on young people and care leavers. Staff and managers report that the training provided to them is improving the quality of their practice.

Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning the next inspection or visit.

Yours sincerely

Vicky Metheringham
Her Majesty's Inspector

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

14th March 2022



Report of: Managing Director

Subject: A19 GRADE SEPARATED JUNCTION, ELWICK
BYPASS AND HARTLEPOOL WESTERN LINK

1. TYPE OF DECISION / APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 For Information

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 The report provides an update on this scheme and members are asked to note the report.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 A comprehensive report on this issue was considered by Finance and Policy Committee (26.11.2018) and then referred to Council (20.12.18). The recommendation approved by Council included the following:

- That approval be given to the use of Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) powers to acquire the land, shown hatched on the plan appended to the report, to deliver the Hartlepool Western Growth Corridor, subject to negotiation with the land owners to resolve the matter without the need for the Council to invoke CPO powers, and that a further report be brought to Elected Members to formally invoke the CPO (including a Statement of Reasons and Schedule of Land to be Acquired) if negotiations with the land owners were unsuccessful.

3.2 The previous reports highlighted a number of key issues, including:

- Increasing congestion on the two main routes into Hartlepool (A689 and A179) and the need to increase road capacity to improve the quality, safety and reliability of the road network;
- The complexity of linking the new road into the A19 which is operated by (then) Highways England, (now) National Highways,

therefore the design and implementation of the scheme requires their approval.

- The complexity of land assembly required for the development being owned by a number of different parties;
- The financial strategy of funding the costs of the road through a combination of grant funding, which covered 43% of the estimated construction costs, and Prudential Borrowing to fund the remaining 57% of the estimated costs.

The Prudential Borrowing will be repaid from Section 106 contributions, which means the loan is not being funded from the General Fund budget.

Section 106 contributions cannot be used for interest cost so these will need to be funded from the Council's resources. It was estimated that Council Tax income from 157 properties would need to be allocated for interest costs until Section 106 contribution repaid the loan, which it was anticipated would be over a 7 to 10 year period.

The financial section of the previous report also outlined a strategy for managing financial risks.

4. LATEST POSITION

- 4.1 As detailed in the previous reports and highlighted in the above this is a complex scheme and the Council needs to work with external organisations, including National Highways and land owners, to deliver this scheme. It was always envisaged that this would be extremely challenging and the situation has been exacerbated as a result of Covid, which has significantly affected day to day business for nearly two years for both the Council and external organisations.
- 4.2 Significant progress has been made with National Highways in recent months in relation to the design of the road and how it will link into the A19. The next key step is to complete a Road Safety Audit Stage 1 (RSA 1) and submit this to National Highways for approval. It is envisaged this will take approximately 6 to 8 weeks – although this will be subject to National Highways workload and priorities. Once the RSA 1 is approved this will enable the Council to confirm the exact land requirements.
- 4.3 Progressing the land acquisition has been, and remains, a key priority for the Council, and although to date it has been very difficult to reach agreement with the Land Agent representing the majority of land owners, officers are continuing to pursue a negotiated settlement, as this would be beneficial to the Council in terms of saving time and costs.

- 4.4. Officers are also progressing all aspects of the project including those associated with the planning and land acquisition processes and will continue to work on the latter with a specialist legal practice with a view to resolving outstanding matters as quickly as possible. It is intended that a further report seeking a formal resolution to progress the CPO process be presented to members later in the year if the ongoing land acquisition discussions do not prove successful.

5. RISK AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 These issues are closely aligned as the key risk issues in relation to land purchase, either by negotiation or CPO, and time scale for delivering the project both have financial implications. These issues were subject to a robust assessment in the previous report.

- 5.2 The key risks remain:

- Land costs - either by negotiation or CPO;
- Construction costs - impact of current inflation and costs of materials;
- Interest rate risks – this is currently a very low risk as the original business case was based on a prudent level of forecast interest rates for when borrowing will be required. Current interest and forecast interest rates are below the business case forecast. This position will continue to be monitored carefully and interest rate risk will be managed in accordance with the approved Treasury Management Strategy.

6. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 There are no specific legal considerations arising from this report. The Chief Solicitor is satisfied however that the project is within the legal powers of the Council and that all relevant legal processes are being followed so as to protect the best interests of the Council.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Consultation and liaison with landowners has been undertaken and will continue via their land agents. Consultation events have previously been held in the Town Centre and Elwick Village.
- 7.2 Interested parties and residents have been able to submit formal comments on the proposed scheme as part of the outline planning application for the proposed scheme.

8. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY	None
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY	None
STAFF	None
ASSET MANAGEMENT	None
ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE	The planning process should ensure that the road is carried out having due regard to sustainable development as required by the National Planning Policy Framework.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The scheme is designed to address safety and capacity issues in relation to traffic movements through Elwick village.
- 9.2 It was always recognised that delivery of this scheme would be challenging owing to land acquisition issues and National Highways requirements regarding linking the new road with the A19. The majority of issues have been agreed with National Highways and it is hoped that the remaining issues will be resolved once the RSA 1 is complete.
- 9.3 Officers will continue to progress the project as set out herein and shall retain the option of compulsory purchase so as to protect the best interests of the Council.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 It is recommended that Members note the report.

11. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 To keep members updated on this strategically important highway improvement scheme.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1 Council Report 20th December 2018 – Hartlepool Western Growth Corridor – Funding Strategy and Compulsory Purchase Order

13. CONTACT OFFICER

Denise McGuckin
Managing Director
01429 523001
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Sign Off:-

Managing Director



Director of Resources and Development



Chief Solicitor



Member questions for Council

Meeting: 24 March 2022

1.	From: Councillor Brenda Harrison
	To: Councillor Shane Moore Chair of Finance and Policy Committee
	Question: <i>The safety of women on our streets is an important issue to all of us and we have been horrified events which highlighted in the media, such as the horrific kidnap and murder of Sarah Everard by an officer in the Metropolitan Police. We also need to acknowledge that these events are the tip of the iceberg.</i> <i>Can the Leader of the Council outline what steps the local authority is taking, in conjunction with its partners, to improve the safety of women on our streets?</i>
2.	From: Councillor Jennifer Elliott
	To: Councillor Shane Moore Chair of Finance and Policy Committee
	Question: <i>The town has come together in a number of ways to stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine and the horrendous situation in which they find themselves. However, while the public have been extraordinary, the Government have been slow to react and the system for accepting refugees has been mired in red tape.</i> <i>Will the leader of the council agree to write jointly, with all members, to the Home Secretary to urge her to strip out the bureaucracy and ensure that those desperately fleeing this despicable conflict have swift, safe passage into the UK?</i>

CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF ORDINARY MEETING

10 DECEMBER 2021



PRESENT:

CHAIR

Cllr Paul Kirton – Stockton on Tees Borough Council

HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cllrs Tom Cassidy, Ben Clayton

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Cllrs Teresa Higgins, Naweed Hussain, Tom Mawston

REDCAR & CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cllrs Cliff Foggo, Mary Ovens

STOCKTON ON TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cllrs Lynn Hall, Steve Matthews, Jean O'Donnell,

AUTHORISED OFFICERS

Chief Fire Officer, ACFO - Community Protection, Legal Adviser and Monitoring Officer, Treasurer

APOLOGIES:

Cllr Tim Fleming - Hartlepool Borough Council

Cllr Jon Rathmell - Middlesbrough Council

Cllrs Billy Ayre, Adam Brook - Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council

Cllr Luke Frost – Stockton on Tees Borough Council

80. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Councillor Tom Mawston to the Authority who was appointed by Middlesbrough Council following the recent resignation of Councillor Ashley Waters.

81. DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS INTEREST

It was noted no Declarations of Interest were submitted to the meeting.

82. MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the Ordinary meeting of 15 October 2021 be confirmed.

83. MINUTES OF MEETINGS

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Executive (Appeals) Committee on 8 November 2021, Audit & Governance Committee on 19 November 2021 and Executive Committee on 26 November 2021 be confirmed.

84. COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED BY THE CHAIR

LGA

Immediate Detriment

Green Book Pay Negotiations

Immediate Detriment

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) provided an update on Immediate Detriment and reported that since the Executive Committee meeting on 26 November 2021, where Members resolved to adopt the LGA Framework, the Home Office and Treasury had changed their position regarding scheme members due to retire or already in receipt of their pension.

84. COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED BY THE CHAIR CONT.

The new position is that Scheme Managers should be responsible for determining the way forward. The CFO outlined the dilemma for authorities and the legal, financial, reputational and leadership risks involved. He added that as National Fire Chiefs Council Pension Lead he will be advising fire authorities to take a risk assessed approach before deciding.

Green Book Pay Negotiations

The CFO informed Members that the unions were currently going through a ballot process in respect of the 1.75% pay offer and business continuity arrangements were in place to ensure minimal impact to services from any industrial action.

RESOLVED – that the communications be noted.

85. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

85.1 COVID-19 Update

The CFO provided Members with a detailed presentation on the latest COVID-19 position, in light of the new variant Omicron. This covered:

- Impact of COVID-19 on the UK
- National Summary
- North-East Local Authorities Infection Rate
- Vaccination Rate
- Staff Wellbeing
- Supporting the Broader Public Sector Response

Councillor Matthews suggested that the Government's Covid-19 figures had been inflated for political reasons to create 'corporate panic'. The CFO noted that while Omicron was believed to spread faster its symptoms appeared less severe than the Delta variant. He added that as a risk management company the Brigade would continue to proportionately apply a risk-based approach to the pandemic.

This approach was welcomed by Councillor Ovens on the basis it allowed the Brigade to continue supporting vulnerable members in the community. She noted that the Brigade had been identified by the Safeguarding Board as a 'good partner' for the safeguarding work it does within the community and asked the CFO to pass on thanks.

Members asked whether the Authority would continue with face-to-face meetings. The Legal Adviser and Monitoring Officer (LAMO) confirmed that the provision for remote meetings expired on 7 May 2021 and there were currently no option for hybrid meetings. The CFO confirmed that further socially distanced arrangements would be in place for future meetings in addition to the Covid secure arrangements.

Members thanked the CFO for the detailed update and expressed sincere thanks to all staff who have volunteered their time over the past year to keep the communities safe.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

85.2 FPS Local Pension Board Report cont.

Members considered the Local Pension Board's Annual Business Report which was presented by the Chair of the Board at the annual meeting on 26 October 2021.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that following Councillor Waters resignation, as an Employer Representative and an interest being expressed from a potential Employee representative, Members were asked to nominate and appoint two Employer representatives to the Board. He also informed Members that the Board had discussed the provision and establishment of substitutes to the Board, to strengthen its quoracy and legal obligations and agreed to appoint one substitute Employer and one Employee Representative. The substitutes would be able to act as Board members in the absence of one of the relevant full members, and would also be encouraged to attend board meetings as observers. Substitutes would also be invited to attend training sessions to help improve their knowledge and understanding of pension issues.

The CFO sought nominations for two employer representatives and one substitute Employer representative. Councillor Hall nominated Councillors Clayton and Matthews as Employer representatives and herself as the substitute, which was seconded.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That Councillors Ben Clayton and Steve Matthews be appointed as Employer Representatives to the FPS Local Pension Board.**
- (ii) That Councillor Lynn Hall be appointed as the Substitute Employer Representative to the FPS Local Pension Board.**
- (iii) That the Chairs Annual Business Report at Appendix 1 be noted.**

85.3 Information Pack

85.3.1 Campaigns

RESOLVED – That the Information Pack be noted.

86. REPORT OF THE TREASURER

86.1 Local Audit & Accountability Act Update

Members considered the issues in relation to appointing an external auditor in respect of the application of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Local Audit (Appointing Person) Regulations 2015. The Treasurer outlined the proposed timetable for opting in to the procurement arrangements and the associated benefits, which had been scrutinised by the Audit & Governance Committee at its meeting on 19 November 2021.

The Treasurer informed Members that the outstanding Pensions information required by Mazars in order to finalise their audit work had now been received and the Audit Completion Report was expected to be published on the website by the end of December.

RESOLVED - That the continued membership of the Public Sector Auditor Appointments (PSAA) for the provision of external audit services in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act, be approved, as recommended by the Audit & Governance Committee on 19 November 2021.

87. REPORT OF THE LEGAL ADVISER AND MONITORING OFFICER

87.1 Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee

The LAMO provided Members with options for appointing an Audit & Governance Chair following the resignation of Councillor Waters, as requested by the Audit & Governance Committee at its meeting on 19 November. Members considered the options which were to:

- (1) appoint a Member of the Committee as Chair in accordance with the terms of reference
- (2) leave the position vacant and rely on the Vice Chair for the next scheduled meeting
- (3) or for the Authority to delegate to the committee the power to appoint a Chair from amongst its membership then present at its next scheduled meeting.

Councillor Higgins proposed Option 2 and Councillor Clayton seconded this. This was further supported by Councillor Mawston on the grounds that there was only one committee meeting before the Annual Meeting and it was not cost effective to pay a Special Responsibilities Allowance for six months to Chair one meeting. Councillors Hall and Matthews did not support Option 2, which they considered to go against the Authority's Terms of Reference for the Committee.

Following a vote, 7 Members voted in favour of Option 2 and 4 against.

RESOLVED – That the position of Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee remain vacant until the Annual Meeting and the Committee relies on the Vice Chair for the next scheduled meeting in February.

88. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) (VARIATION ORDER) 2006

RESOLVED - "That under Section 100(A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business, on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 & 3 of Part 1 of the Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, namely information relating to an individual; and information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information.)"

89. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF MEETINGS

RESOLVED – that the Confidential Minutes of the Executive (Appeals) Committee on 8 November 2021 and Executive Committee on 26 November 2021 be confirmed.

90. ANY OTHER CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

90.1 Email to Members

Members updated the CFO on this issue.

**COUNCILLOR PAUL KIRTON
CHAIR**