

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

25 APRIL 2022

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

Present:

Councillor Shane Moore (In the Chair)

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

Also Present: Councillor Creevy as substitute for Councillor Brash in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2.
Councillor Falconer as substitute for Councillor Stokell in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2.

Officers: Denise McGuckin, Managing Director
Hayley Martin, Chief Solicitor
Chris Little, Director of Resources and Development
Paul Taylor, Strategic Development and Sustainability Manager
Sally Robinson, Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services
Jill Harrison, Director of Adult and Community Based Services
Tony Hanson, Director of Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services
Steve Hilton, Communications and Marketing Team
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

98. Apologies for Absence

Councillors Jonathan Brash, Tim Fleming and Cameron Stokell.

99. Declarations of Interest

None.

100. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2022

Received.

101. Minutes of the meeting of the Safer Hartlepool Partnership held on 6 December 2021

Received.

102. Minutes of the meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board held on 29 November 2021

Received.

103. Household Support Fund *(Director, 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 to Finance and Policy Committee 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 the Government had announced on 23 March in the Spring Statement that the Household Support Fund would be extended from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022. Hartlepool has been allocated the same level of funding as for the previous period, £993,021.25.

It was highlighted by the Director, however, that there were some changes made to how the fund should be administered. In the new conditions set by government, at least one third of the total funding must be spent on families with children and at least one third must be spent on pensioners, the latter being new for this funding scheme. The remainder of the funding (up to one third) is available for other vulnerable households (without children or pensioners including individuals).

The Government's expectation was that the grant should be used in a similar fashion to the original funding but with a greater emphasis on supporting households with energy bills, though food and water bills also remained a priority.

Officers had explored the available options to maximise the impact of this grant to support vulnerable households in Hartlepool. Following the successful delivery of the 21/22 HSF, it was proposed that a similar model is implemented for the current scheme, adapted to meet the new grant determination conditions. Details of the allocations were set out in the report with an explanation of the rationale behind each. The Council's voluntary and community sector partners who supported the delivery of the previous scheme report that they reached many people in need through participating in the scheme and distributing financial assistance as well as

collaborating with each other to maximise support and reach. They were, therefore, happy to continue to work with the Council in delivering the April to September HSF scheme. It was highlighted that the administration of such a large grant posed significant challenges to the capacity and workload of the local authority.

The Chair commented that he had previously enquired about the clawback arrangements on the pre-paid supermarket cards which had been possible. The Chair questioned what comments parents had made on the pre-paid cards scheme. The Director stated that parents had generally been very positive about the pre-paid cards. The previous scheme involving vouchers that had to be scanned at the till had caused some issue and some had commented on the stigma it also raised; the cards avoided that.

The Director stated that instead of the ability to clawback unused spend on the cards issued under the new scheme, an overall reduction in the price of the cards of 3% had been negotiated with the two supermarkets; Morrison's and Tesco. In response to Members question, the Director stated that only these two supermarkets had supported the bulk purchase of pre-paid cards.

Members also raised questions around the sustainability of The Bread and Butter Thing. The Director of Adult and Community Based Services stated that the initiative was self-sustaining having received funding from the Council for the initial twelve month period, as had been intended. There were also questions around the administration element of the funding which was indicated at 5%, which officers stated compared well against other authorities.

Members questioned the split of £70 payment to pensioners and £60 to support children through the school holidays. The Director of Resources and Development stated that the government had directed the level of spend on pensioners to one third of the overall funding. If this had been limited to pensioners in receipt of Local Council Tax Support in Band A and Band B properties, the payment would have been £76. Enabling all pensioners in receipt of LCTS to receive a payment only reduced that to £70, which was the recommended level. . In relation to the funding for children, the Director stated the £60 payment was per child so families would receive a payment for each child eligible for free school meals. There were also some additional pre-paid cards that would be issued to schools to allocate on a discretionary basis to support those families that schools knew may experience hardship during the long school holiday.

There was no dissent to the following decision.

Decision

That the proposals outlined in the report be approved and that officers be authorised to implement the scheme as outlined.

104. Option to Lease Land at Hartmoor for Energy Storage *(Director of Resources and Development)*

Type of decision

Key Decision (test (i) or (ii)) Forward Plan Reference No CE78/22.

Purpose of report

To seek Committee's approval to granting an Option to Lease an area of land at Hartmoor.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Resources and Development reported that the Council had been approached over the course of the last few months by a number of Companies with offers to secure an option to lease an area of Council land of varying sizes depending on the particular operator, in the location of Hartmoor near Hart Village. The land presently formed part of an area let on a Farm Business Tenancy due to expire in March 2023.

The reason for the interest is that the National Grid (NG) has identified the Hartmoor Sub-Station, a 275kv electrical supply point located to the south of the Councils land, as a suitable location for a new project under their Stability Pathfinder 3 Project. The project involves NG appointing a partner to help address stability issues on the electricity system and support the transition to renewable energy, and ultimately a zero-carbon network. The solutions being put forward by the Companies who have made offers for the Councils land are for either a Synchronous Condenser (an alternative system for electricity storage) or a Battery Storage facility or a combination of both depending upon NG's preference.

Details of the offers received from the various parties are set out and evaluated in the confidential appendix to the report. The appendix contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely, (para 3), information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

Members welcomed the scheme while noting that the proposal would still require planning approval. The Chair welcomed the proposal as a scheme that could generate additional long term income for the Council. The Chair thanked the Estates Team for their work in bringing this proposal to fruition.

The Chief Solicitor sought an additional recommendation approving the use of the NEPO legal framework to acquire the necessary legal support for the lease.

There was no dissent to the following decisions.

Decision

1. That the granting of an Option to lease the Council's land in line with the terms set out in the confidential appendix to the report be approved. The appendix contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely, (para 3), information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
2. That authority be delegated to the Director of Resources and Development in consultation with the Chief Solicitor and Chair of Finance and Policy Committee to agree detailed terms of the contract.
3. Committee noted that the recurring income would only be received if the company's bid to National Grid was successful.
4. That the Chief Solicitor be authorised to procure appropriate legal support for the preparation and agreement of the lease through the appropriate North East Procurement Organisation legal framework.

105. Town Deal Business Cases – Health and Care Academy and Civil Engineering Academy *(Director of Resources and Development)*

Type of decision

Non-key Decision.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to update the Committee on the development of the project Business Cases under the Council's £25m Town Deal Programme; to provide a programme update; and present the draft cases for both the Health and Care Academy and Civil Engineering Academy for information.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Resources and Development reported that following the agreement of Heads of Terms, under Town Deal, the Council had 12 months to develop, approve and submit Green Book compliant Business Cases with the agreed projects set out in detail, through an independent assurance framework together with a Summary Document to DLUCH (Department for Levelling Up Communities and Housing). The programme was working to a timetable of submission to DLUCH by 27th July 2022. DLUCH would need to review and be satisfied with the Summary Document before any funding could be released from September 2022 onwards.

The report provided detailed updates in relation to the two academy business cases; The Health and Care Academy and the Civil Engineering Academy. The Health and Care Academy is a partnership project promoted by the North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust, in conjunction with Hartlepool College of Further Education and with Hartlepool Borough Council acting as accountable body. The Civil Engineering Institute project is a strategic partnership between Seymour Civil Engineering Contractors (CEC) and Hartlepool College of Further Education (HCFE) to support the consolidation and growth of teaching and training capacity at two existing sites, to enhance and future-proof facilities.

The detailed business cases were attached to the report for Members information. The Director highlighted that DLUCH required business cases to have a Benefit Cost Ratio of at least 1.0. The Health and Care Academy delivered a Benefit Cost Ratio of 3.5, while the Civil Engineering Academy delivered a Benefit Cost Ratio of 9.1.

The Chair expressed his thanks to all those that had been involved in bringing these first two business cases forward under the Town Deal. The two academy proposals also showed that the project was not simply about bricks and mortar but investing people for the future of Hartlepool. Members also welcomed the two academy proposals as a welcome addition to enhancing the future employment prospects of people in Hartlepool.

There were questions around the new jobs connected with the Health and Care Academy and the throughput of students. The Managing Director indicated that the North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust and the Hartlepool College of Further education both already had staff involved in training and development. The additional jobs would enhance those numbers. It was also highlighted that the Health and Care Academy would give training new opportunities in what is now the 4th biggest growth sector in the Country. The Managing Director referred to the remaining project business cases and indicated that they were scheduled to be presented to the Finance and Policy Committee in July, though there was the potential for some slippage on the Middleton Grange Shopping Centre proposal due to the number of land owners involved.

There was no dissent to the following decisions.

Decision

1. That the contents of the report and update on progress with the overall programme be noted.
2. That the submission of the two Academy Business Cases to DLUCH be approved, following independent assurance, as the latest stage in our approved Town Deal programme.

106. Rossmere Pitches - St Francis FC (*Director of Resources and Development*)

Type of decision

Non-key Decision.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to seek consent for a new lease of Land at Rossmere Way to be granted to St Francis FC at less than best value.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Resources and Development reported that a 25 year lease was granted to St Francis 2000 Football Club of Land at Rossmere Way in 2006. The Club had expanded considerably since that time and was now applying the Football Foundation for a grant of around £80,000 as part of a scheme costing £150,000 to provide a clubhouse with changing facilities.

Due to the size and type of grant being applied for by the club, the Football Foundation required the club to have at least 25 years unexpired on their lease, although the grant conditions would only apply for the slightly shorter period of 21 years. As the current lease had only about 9 years left to run, the club requested that a new lease be granted. Terms had now been agreed for the surrender of the existing lease and grant of a new longer term lease, as set out in the confidential appendix to the report. The appendix contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely (para 3), information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

Members welcomed the proposal and commented on the excellent work the club did with young people in the town. There was concern expressed at the car parking issues experienced by local residents when there were club games being played and Members requested that officers investigate potential solutions.

There was no dissent to the following decision.

Decision

That the grant of a new lease to St Francis 2000 Football Club on the terms set out in confidential appendix to the report be approved. The appendix contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely (para 3), information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

107. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

None.

The meeting concluded at 11.10 am

H MARTIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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