

# **FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE**

## **MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD**

**18 SEPTEMBER 2023**

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

**Present:**

Councillor Mike Young (In the Chair)

Councillors: Moss Boddy, Paddy Brown, Bob Buchan, Tom Feeney, Gerard Hall, Brenda Harrison, Jim Lindridge, Sue Little and Andrew Martin-Wells.

Also Present: Councillor Ben Clayton as substitute for Councillor Melanie Morley in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2.  
Councillors Shane Moore and David Nicholson.

Officers: Denise McGuckin, Managing Director  
Hayley Martin, Director of Legal, Governance and Human Resources  
James Magog, Director of Finance, IT and Digital  
Paul Dixon, Assistant Director, Corporate and Financial Services  
Laura Griffiths, Assistant Director, Customer Services and IT  
Sally Robinson, Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services  
Claire Robinson, Public Health Principal  
Jill Harrison, Executive Director of Adult and Community Based Services  
Gemma Ptak, Assistant Director, Preventative and Community Based Services  
Ian Gardiner, Head of Leisure, Recreation and Participation  
Tony Hanson, Executive Director of Development, Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services  
Beverley Bearne, Assistant Director, Development and Growth  
Kieran Bostock, Assistant Director, Place Management  
Scott Parkes, Consultancy Manager, Environmental Engineering  
Joan Stevens, Scrutiny Manager  
Connor Kerr and Steve Hilton, Communications and Marketing Team  
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

## **17. Apologies for Absence**

Councillor Melanie Morley.

**18. Declarations of Interest**

None.

**19. Minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2023**

Received.

**20. Minutes of the meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board held on 20 March 2023**

Received.

**21. Audit and Governance Committee Investigation - Accessibility of Council Services in Hartlepool for Those with Disabilities and Long Term Conditions – Results of Additional Consultation** (*Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee*)

**Type of decision**

Non-key decision.

**Purpose of report**

To present the results of the additional consultation, undertaken at the request of the Finance and Policy Committee on the 3rd July 2023; and the Action Plan produced to inform consideration of the investigation's recommendations.

**Issue(s) for consideration**

Councillor Hargreaves, a Member of the Audit and Governance Committee presented the report on behalf of the Chair of the Committee, Councillor Brash, who could not attend. Councillor Hargreaves highlighted the further consultation that had been undertaken as requested by the Finance and Policy Committee. Councillor Hargreaves commended the report and, in particular, the action plan to the Committee and also thanked the Statutory Scrutiny Manager and her team for the work in undertaking the investigation and preparing the final report.

The Chair thanked Councillor Hargreaves and stated that he was aware of the amount of work that had gone into the further consultation exercise. A Member noted that the responses to the further consultation were still low but commented that it had to be assumed following the further consultation exercise that the majority of people were happy with the conclusions and recommendations in the report.

The Chair highlighted the prioritisation of the recommendations listed within the investigation report. The Statutory Scrutiny Manager indicated that as part of the action plan the Audit and Governance Committee had highlighted where it believed additional resources would be required. Members questioned if the recommendations had been costed at this stage. Officers stated that costs had not yet been assessed and it was proposed by Members that the costings for the recommendations be identified and reported back to this Committee.

## **Decision**

Finance and Policy Committee agreed to the following recommendations set out in the investigation report:-

1. That the outcome of the extended consultation process and Action Plan produced be noted and that a further report be submitted to the Committee setting out the costings of the recommendations of the investigation below.
2. That the recommendations of the Audit and Governance Committee, following their investigation into the accessibility of council services in Hartlepool for those with disabilities and Long Term conditions, as detailed below be approved:-
  - (i) Exploration of some adjustments would require more significant investment and be longer term actions. Other short / medium term actions would be to:-
    - (a) Develop a communications campaign to:
      - Highlight the various support schemes and reasonable adjustments that are already have in place;
      - Promote 'One-Stop-Shop' touch points such as the Civic Centre reception and Community Hubs where people can get assistance with everything in one place. Making those who find accessing the Civic Centre aware that the same service can be accessed elsewhere; and
      - Promote the role of Community Hubs and Community Navigators to increase the understanding of the services they offer.
    - (b) Ensure that community buildings and touch points have posters and leaflets on display for a range of disability support groups and charities.
    - (c) Circulate basic guidance to staff on font size and type, use of plain English, how to book an interpreter when one is required and put this information in an easy to find location on the intranet.
    - (d) Create an "accessibility" tile on the intranet homepage so it is easy to find and collate a range of useful accessibility information for staff to be able to find quickly and easily when a disabled person makes contact.

- (ii) Equality of access to services for all is a fundamental right and residents with disabilities and long term conditions should not be restricted in terms of the times they can access services or the levels of privacy they can expect. To this end:-
  - (a) A Text Relay Service should be introduced;
  - (b) Given the financial restrictions faced by the local authority, the feasibility and benefits, of creation of a pod facility in the Civic Centre be explored to allow residents and officers to use online signing / translation services;
  - (c) The creation of a network of British Sign Language (BSL) trained staff, to act as first point of contact for volunteers, be explored;
  - (d) Existing TV screens in the Civic Centre reception be used to promote accessibility services and the assistance that is available; and
  - (e) The Loop system currently used in council buildings be reviewed to ensure that it is still compatible with modern hearing aids.
- (iii) Provide access to a video / telephone translation service (for BSL and other languages) in the Civic Centre, and a private room for the discussion of confidential issues. This facility to be promoted (e.g. via signs on glass partitions in a similar way to how pharmacies tell customers they can use a private consultation room).
- (iv) A review of workforce training be undertaken to explore how disability awareness and an understanding of reasonable adjustments, could be increased, within available resources. As part of this:-
  - (a) Accessibility and diversity awareness training to be rolled out as mandatory training for all HBC staff and offered as an option for Councillors as part of the induction process; and
  - (b) Options for training be explored including the use of online packages to allow ease of access and roll out across departments, without the need for an external trainer.
- (v) The newly established Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer Group to be used as a mechanism to share best practice, monitor performance and identify service improvements.
- (vi) Improvements to the HBC website be explored to ensure that it is EDI compliant going forward, including but not be limited to:-
  - (a) Read options for documents, to allow access by blind or visually impaired residents;

- (b) Captions / signing on social media posts / videos; and
  - (c) When time-critical videos are posted on social media, and there is not time to set up closed captions, the video should include a text card to say that subtitles will be added. For videos which are not time-critical subtitles should be added before they are uploaded.
- (vii) Council reports, documents and forms must be accessible (easy read / screen reader friendly) and going forward clear content guidance should to be provided, and its use promoted, including:-
- (a) Where appropriate, instructions for the inclusion of links to allow the use of screen readers; and
  - (b) Promotion of use of a document accessibility checker.
- (viii) A consultation to be undertaken with partners on the potential benefits, and level of support for, the creation of a needs passport / card system that could be used to ensure that officers quickly recognise and respond to any additional support needs.
- (ix) The process for creation of the Highlight on the Waterfront development is an example of good practice in terms of engagement / involvement with residents with disabilities and lifelong conditions. This good practice to be rolled out across the development of all services and strategies.

## 22. Public Question

A public question for the Council meeting on 28 September 2023 had been received from Mr Steven Cosgrove. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.8, the Managing Director, in consultation with the Chair of Council, considered that the question would be more appropriately referred to the next relevant Policy Committee for answer to be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Protocol for Public Questions at Policy Committee meetings. The question had, therefore, been referred to this meeting of the Finance and Policy Committee.

Mr Cosgrove was not present at the meeting; his question, as submitted, was as follows: –

On the 13th of July I attended my first council meeting in 63 years, specifically to observe the agenda item about allotment rents. At the meeting members on both sides congratulated themselves for a successful Tall Ships weekend and suggested that we will do it again in the future. In 2009 the Tall ships event cost the council around £4 million pounds so it is reasonable to expect this event to cost £5M+, yet, as was discussed briefly at the meeting, child poverty in Hartlepool is at an extremely high level, and budgets are unbelievably stretched. My question is this; Will the council

make a commitment to not hold any such major events costing, millions of pounds, of our tight budget, while we lead the way in child poverty.

In responding to the question, the Chair made the following comments.

“The costs associated with delivering the recent Tall Ships event are not finalised as yet, but will be substantially less than the £5m plus assumed in the question and are also expected to be less than the costs incurred in 2010 which is a significant achievement in the context of inflation and the impact of Covid on the events industry. It should also be noted that the 2023 event was supported financially by the Tees Valley Combined Authority as well as through sponsorship and income generation.

The economic benefits of the event to the town are currently being evaluated and will be reported in due course, but again are expected to be significant given the number of visitors in attendance and the incredibly positive informal feedback received to date from local businesses, residents and visitors.

Poverty (including child poverty) is a real challenge in Hartlepool and the Council is committed to investing in tackling root causes as well as supporting people who experience poverty. The needs and priorities of local people are taken into account when funding decisions are made and this will continue to be the case, including during consideration of any future large scale events.

It should be noted that the core mission of the Tall Ships Races is to provide young people with life changing experiences. The event in Hartlepool gave over 80 young people the opportunity to take part as sail trainees and involved many more through the education programme with schools. This sort of opportunity can inspire young people and raise their aspirations as well as providing them with skills, friendships and the chance to travel.

It is not considered appropriate to rule out major events being delivered in Hartlepool in the future until we know the full cost of the recent Tall Ships event and understand the associated economic impact. Many large scale events attract significant levels of external funding, and it is likely that any future events that may be planned for the town would be contingent on external funding being secured.”

The Director of Finance, IT and Digital informed Members that a report on the outcomes of the Tall Ships event would be submitted to the November meeting of the Committee, though he highlighted that not all the outcomes may be finalised by that time.

Members referenced the question and asked what actions were specifically being taken to tackle child poverty. The Managing Director commented that there were different root causes of child and family poverty in the community with many complexities and interactive issues. A Member

commented that the Audit and Governance Committee had in the last municipal year produced a report following an investigation into the causes of family poverty and the Committee had fully endorsed its recommendations at the previous meeting. The Vice Chair commented that significant events such as the Tall Ships had the ability to put Hartlepool on the map and help local businesses reach a wider audience.

### **Decision**

That the response to the question be shared with Mr Cosgrove.

## **23. Strategic Financial Management Report - as at 30th June 2023** *(Director of Finance, IT and Digital)*

### **Type of decision**

Budget and Policy Framework.

### **Purpose of report**

The purpose of the report was to inform Members of:

- i) Forecast General Fund outturn for 2023/24;
- ii) Forecast Housing Revenue Account outturn for 2023/24;
- iii) Corporate Income Collection Performance; and
- iv) Capital Programme Monitoring 2023/24.

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

The Director of Finance, IT and Digital provided the Committee with the first strategic financial management report of the financial year and highlighted for Members some of the key financial issues faced by the Authority. The Director indicated that there were a number of local authorities issuing Section 114 Notices and stated that while Hartlepool was not immune to the national pressures that were forcing some Authorities down the S114 route, it would still be necessary to make some difficult decisions now as pushing such decisions forward would only increase the likelihood of the need for a S114 Notice significantly in the forthcoming years.

The Director updated the Committee on the current General Fund Outturn position reporting that there was now an overspend of £3.935m predicted for the end of the year. This figure had significantly increased since the previous budget report and together with the planned use of £2.5m of one-off reserves, the Council was currently £6.5m above a sustainable budget. The largest cause of the overspend was Children's social care with the costs of external care being a major issue having risen by over 45% in three years. This was a national issue for local government.

The Director stated that were the Council to overspend by £4m this year, that would remove almost all of the flexibility put in place through the budget support fund, leading to an even more challenging MTFS position for the following two years.

The Director highlighted the other sections of the report outlining capital expenditure, the Housing Revenue Account, sundry debts and the collection fund performance. The Director also highlighted that the further information requested by Members at the previous meeting in relation to a proposed debt write off was set out in a confidential appendix to the report. The appendix contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely, para 3; information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

A Member commented on the financial situation stating that there needed to be clear ideas for the future management of the Council and its facilities. The Member commented that they would wish to see the future of as many facilities as possible secured; places such as the Town Hall Theatre, the Borough Hall, and CECA (Centre for Excellence in Creative Arts). The Assistant Director, Preventative and Community Based Services commented that there were a number of historical issues with some venues and most were still recovering 'footfall' after the Covid-19 pandemic. The Council was working with the Tees Valley Combined Authority and the Northern School of Art on the future use of CECA and it was in a much better position than the recent past.

A Member suggested that there needed to be cross party working and work with other Tees Valley authorities on the issues around Children's Services and suggested a Working Group to review the matter in detail. Members also expressed severe concern that since the previous reported overspend of £1m the situation three months later was nearly £4m.

The Managing Director stated that there was already joint working across the North East local authorities on Children's Social Care and Directors regularly lobbied Government Ministers. The Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services provided some details to Members of the issues being faced in children's social care and assured Members that there was no mis-management and outlined the regional work on these issues. A single child in care with complex care needs could cost £500,000. Costs had simply increased significantly with fewer providers being able to command higher prices.

The Committee discussed the issues around children's social care at length expressing their grave disappointment at the lack of additional support from Government and the lack of national market control in the sector. Members also noted the adverse budget variance in relation to parking and asked if the Tees Valley Mayor had given further consideration to extending the free



parking initiative. It was reported that the Tees Valley Mayor had stated the initiative was a one-off scheme that would not be continued.

Members suggested that a copy of the report be shared with the Hartlepool MP and for her support in lobbying Ministers.

### **Decision**

1. That the forecast revenue outturn position and accompanying financial performance for the quarter, including decisions undertaken for urgency be noted;
2. The Committee noted the seriousness of the financial position and that actions are being progressed to mitigate this as far as possible as outlined in the report;
3. That the Housing Revenue Account position as reported, be noted;
4. That the forecast capital outturn position, including any budget realignments, was noted; and
5. That the write off as set out in confidential appendix of the report, be approved.
6. That a copy of the report be forwarded to the Hartlepool MP seeking her support in lobbying Ministers for further support for Hartlepool particularly in relation to Children's social care.

## **24. Local Council Tax Support 2023/24** *(Director of Finance, IT and Digital)*

### **Type of decision**

Budget and Policy Framework.

### **Purpose of report**

The purpose of the report was to:

- i) Update Members on the operation of the Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme; and
- ii) Set out options for a new income banded / grid scheme for working age applicants from 1st April 2024 to increase the overall level of support for the lowest income families, improve the level of Council Tax collection and to reduce the administrative burden placed on the Council by the introduction of Universal Credit.

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

The Director of Finance, IT and Digital set out proposals for a fundamental redesign of the LCTS Scheme to address issues around the administration burden of the existing scheme and the impact of Universal Credit. A number of other Councils had, over recent years, moved to a simplified or banded system for LCTS. A banded system for Hartlepool was proposed and the new scheme set out in the report would ensure that more support would be given to those working age households on the lowest of incomes than in the current scheme. The report set out in detail the issues with the current system, the impact of Universal Credit, the benefits of a simplified banded system, those that would benefit and those that would not, the options in relation to non-dependents.

The Director indicated that Members would need to consider options in relation to non-dependent deductions prior to the consultation on the proposals could commence. Consultation would need to commence very soon to allow an 8 week consultation process prior to a finalised decision being taken on the LCTS scheme before the end of the year by this Committee and then Council early in the New Year to allow the scheme to be implemented by in line with legislation.

The Chair commented that after careful consideration of the proposals set out in the report he supported Option 1 in relation to non-dependents where no charges would be imposed. This was supported by other Members. There was concern at the consultation process with Members concerned that the recipients of LCTS were often from sectors of the community that was less likely to engage with the Council. It was suggested that voluntary sector groups should be approached to support the consultation process particularly in reaching those 'hard to reach' sectors of the community. The Director welcomed the suggestion and also indicated that staff would be asking those phoning the Council when claiming or discussing their LCTS if they wished to participate in the consultation process by answering some questions while on the call.

The following decision was agreed on a majority vote.

### **Decision**

1. That the current costs and administration impact/risks associated with the LCTS scheme be noted;
2. That the option for a new income banded / grid scheme for working age applicants from 1st April 2024 to reduce the administrative burden placed on the Council by the introduction of Universal Credit, to increase the overall level of support for the lowest income families and to improve the level of Council Tax collection be approved;

3. That the option for the basis of consultation with the public and major precepting authorities on the introduction of such scheme be based on Option 1 - no non-dependant charges; and
4. That a further report be submitted to the November meeting of this Committee setting out the results of the consultation, in order to consider and determine the option to be recommended to Council.

## **25. Tobacco Control Draft Strategy** *(Director of Public Health)*

### **Type of decision**

Key Decision (General Exception Notice Applies).

### **Purpose of report**

To share the draft Tobacco Control Strategy, and seek approval from Finance and Policy Committee for final sign off of the strategy.

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

The Public Health Principal reported that the draft Tobacco Control Strategy for Hartlepool had been informed by the Hartlepool Smoking Needs Assessment findings and had been developed following a consultation event and engagement with partners. Alongside the strategy, an action plan had been developed which set out under each theme details of how we would deliver these priority areas, who will deliver, timescales and be informed by indicators in order to measure success through an outcome framework.

There was no dissent to the following decision.

### **Decision**

That the draft Tobacco Control Strategy and associated action plan be approved.

## **26. Highlight Leisure Facility** *(Executive Director of Adult and Community Based Services and Director of Finance, IT and Digital)*

### **Type of decision**

Key Decision Test I and II – General Exception Notice Applies.

### **Purpose of report**

The report provided Members with an update on the proposed development of the Highlight leisure and wellbeing facility and sought support for the proposed funding strategy.

### Issue(s) for consideration

The Executive Director of Adult and Community Based Services reported that During the period January 2021 to July 2022, the project has progressed through a number of milestones with the project now fully developed to Technical Design. This level of information is sufficient to obtain a fixed price tender for the delivery of the construction phase of the project.

The early part of 2023 saw two large regional contractors with significant leisure centre experience go into liquidation which caused extensive uncertainty in the market, particularly in the North East. This led to an unavoidable delay while the project team considered alternative approaches to procuring a suitably experienced contractor.

Following a competitive procurement process, Wates Construction, a leader in the sport and leisure sector nationally, were identified as the preferred contractor to progress the development. Wates were appointed under a Pre-Construction Services Agreement (PCSA) whereby they become part of the project team to develop the final design, resulting in them being able to provide a fixed price tender for the delivery of the construction phase of the development.

The Executive Director indicated that additional costs of £2.790m had arisen in addition to main construction costs since the original process was completed in July. Much of this was due to price increases across all elements building work and supplies. It was also recommended that the Council create a contingency pot of £1.860m to cover any unexpected risks that arise as construction commences, which was standard practice for construction projects of this size.

Therefore the proposed facility, based on the medium case scenario being achieved through value engineering and including the offsite ancillary works are as follows:

Element	Value
Highlight Tender Sum (medium case)	£30.000m
Additional Project Costs	£2.790m
Risk/Contingency	£1.860m
<b>Total</b>	<b>£34.650m</b>

When taking into consideration the total anticipated costs, there is therefore a budget shortfall of £9m. Rationalisation of the offer within the strategic leisure centre creates significant risk against the outcomes, business model and revenue projections compared to the one off capital investment it would save. Any changes to the proposed leisure facility at this stage would incur significant additional costs attached to design and other feasibility work as well as adding further delay and risk of continued inflation increasing the overall costs.

It should be noted that the original budget for the project was developed in 2019/20. Since that time, inflation, energy costs and other factors have had a huge impact upon the whole of the UK, including the construction market. Following extensive research to understand the regional construction market, these costs do not appear to be abnormal with a number of other high profile projects being subject to similar pressures.

The Executive Director also outlined the risks associated from either abandoning the scheme or reducing its scope to bring down costs. Reducing or removing elements of the Highlight proposals could significantly affect the external funding that had been obtained for the scheme. A significant amount of work has been undertaken by officers to develop a revised funding strategy to address the budget shortfall and this included an additional £500,000 from Sport England. There would, however, be an additional prudential borrowing requirement of £4.5m, though this would only bring the borrowing requirement to around half the cost of the total scheme when the external funding was considered. There would also be the use of Capital Contingencies (£2.5m) and additional resources from a review of the Capital Programme (£1.5m).

Members questioned and discussed the increased costs for the Highlight in some detail. While there was acknowledgement that much of the delay and costs were outside of the Council's control, there was still significant concern expressed by some Members at the increases now reported. The Chair voiced his support for the project and considered that while the additional costs were unwelcomed, the business case for the Highlight still made financial sense for the authority and there was strong public support for the new facility. Officers assured Members that external funders had examined the scheme and consider that the increased costs are in line with national trends and in many ways, not a surprise.

Members sought assurance that this was the final costs of the scheme and that no further requests for additional funding would be forthcoming. Officers assured Members that as far as was known at this time, this would be the final cost of the scheme. The Director of Finance, IT and Digital also assured Members that the prudential borrowing was affordable over the 40 year expected lifespan of the project.

All Members expressed their concerns at the increase in costs but acknowledged that these were reflective of costs rising in all aspects of life following the Covid-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war. Members considered that there was still a very strong desire among the public for a new modern swimming facility in the town and this was the scheme the Council needed to deliver to them.

The following decision was agreed by a majority vote.

## **Decision**

That the revised funding strategy for the Highlight Leisure Facility, as set out in the report, be approved and that Council be recommended to approve the changes to the capital programme and the additional borrowing.

## **27. Sale of Gladstone House** *(Executive Director of Development, Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services)*

### **Type of decision**

Key Decision.

### **Purpose of report**

The report sought approval for the sale of Gladstone House, 46 Victoria Road, Hartlepool.

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

The Executive Director of Development, Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services reported that following the termination of the Addaction lease in 2020 the property was considered for various other uses by both the Council and the NHS, however it was not thought to be suitable for any of them and therefore the property was placed on the market for sale and to let in September 2022. A confirmed bid had now been received for the property and details of this were 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, paragraph 3, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

Members supported the sale but were concerned that the property would be used as a HMO, particularly as there were already a number in this area. The Managing Director stated that she understood the building would be used as offices but would confirm that with Members after the meeting.

## **Decision**

That the sale of Gladstone House, 46 Victoria Road be approved in the terms set out in the confidential appendix to the report.

There was a short comfort break before the next item on the agenda.

The Managing Director withdrew from the meeting for the following item.

## **28. Petition** *(Managing Director)*

### **Type of decision**

Non-Key Decision.

### **Purpose of report**

To inform Members of the receipt of a petition from the public

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

The Director of Legal, Governance and Human Resources reported that a petition has been submitted to the Council. The terms of the petition were, however, stated on two different forms though the lead petitioners have asked for them to be considered together –

1. “2022 REFERENDUM REQUEST REF. R/R BILL 40

This is from the public of Hartlepool to state that they have no confidence in the council in the way they deal with the public, Council Tax one of the highest in the country, debt, and vanity projects a waste of money. child poverty is a major problem, food banks are being used more & more, roads not been cleaned, main services being cut. Democracy being denied, freedom of being denied & legal rights ignored.”

2. “Hartlepool Council Residents “VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE”

To: Residents of Hartlepool.

Hartlepool Council is not giving the support to the needs of its council taxpayers, 5% + £32 to empty brown bins.

Why is this important?

Residents of Hartlepool are not getting value for money, even though we pay one of the highest council tax country.

The two petitions together had been signed by a total of 3890 people.

In relation to the referendum element of the petition, The Director stated that it was not clear what specific question the public was to be asked.

Members questioned if there were any duplicate signatures between the two petitions. The Director stated that this had not be examined. There had much confusion around the petition and the Director had met with the lead petitioners on a number of occasions clarifying the law around a petition for a change of governance model. However, neither element of the petition was worded to that effect. In response to Member questions, the Director stated that for a change of governance model referendum, a petition including the names of 5% of the total electorate for the town would need to be submitted and verified.

Members considered that without any real clarity as to what the petitions were asking the Council to do they should simply be noted at this time with no further action to be taken.

There was no dissent to the following decision.

**Decision**

That the petition submitted be noted and that no further action be taken.

**29. Developing the New Council Plan 2024-2029 – Proposed Timetable and First Stage Consultation Process** *(Managing Director)*

**Type of decision**

Non-key Decision.

**Purpose of report**

The purpose of the report was for Finance and Policy Committee to consider and agree the process for developing the new Council Plan 2024/25 – 2028/29 including a Borough-wide consultation and engagement exercise.

**Issue(s) for consideration**

The Managing Director reported on the process and timetable for the production of a new Council Plan. The report outlined the extensive consultation process that would be undertaken with Members, staff and the public and the timetable for undertaking the consultation and reporting to Members on the draft and finalised plans.

Members welcomed the extensive consultation that was proposed for the development of the plan but noted that the Council's public consultation did not always produce much feedback and that every effort needed to be made to engage with as many elements of the community as possible understanding that many did not have access to digital services.

**Decision**

That the process for developing the new Council Plan 2024/25 – 2028/29 including a Borough-wide consultation and engagement exercise as reported be approved.



### **30. Corporate Complaints Monitoring Report for 2022/23** (Monitoring Officer)

#### **Type of decision**

For information.

#### **Purpose of report**

The purpose of the report was to inform Finance and Policy Committee of the 2022/23 outturn position in relation to corporate complaints and those considered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

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

The Director of Legal, Governance and Human Resources and Monitoring Officer reported that there had been a reduction in the number of corporate complaints received with 9 being received in 2022/23 down from 12 in the previous year. Of these, only 3 (33%) were either fully or partially upheld.

The LGSCO Annual Review 2023 Letter, received 19th July 2023 set out the annual statistics on complaints made to the LGSCO about Hartlepool Borough Council (HBC) for the year ending 31st March 2023. The data shows both the complaints and the enquiries that the LGSCO had recorded along with any decisions they have made.

In summary, in 2022/23 the LGSCO received 18 complaints or enquiries about HBC, which was a reduction of 6 on the previous year, and of those only 2 required detailed investigation and neither were upheld by the LGSCO.

Appendices to the report set out brief details of both the corporate complaints and those investigated by the LGSCO.

Members noted the report and questioned if details of the compliments the Council received for its services could be provided as a useful balance to the complaints statistics.

#### **Decision**

That the report be noted.

### **31. Corporate Procurement Quarterly Report on Contracts** (Executive Director of Development, Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services)

#### **Type of decision**

For information.

### **Purpose of report**

To satisfy the requirements of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules with regard to the Finance and Policy Committee:

- Receiving and examining quarterly reports on the outcome of contract letting procedures including those where the lowest/highest price is not payable/receivable.
- Receiving and examining reports on any exemptions granted in respect of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

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

The Executive Director of Development, Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services provided the Committee with an update report on the Council's recent procurement activity. Appendix C to the report included commercial information in respect of the tenders received and any confidential information relating to Contract Procedure Rule exemptions or contract extensions. 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 indicated a wish to discuss some of the issues set out in Appendix C and, therefore, moved the appropriate resolution to move into closed session.

### **Decision**

That the meeting move into closed session.

## **32. Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation Order) 2006**

Under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public were excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs referred to below of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

Minute 33 – Corporate Procurement Quarterly Report on Contracts – This item contains exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 namely (para 3)

**33. Corporate Procurement Quarterly Report on Contracts** *(Executive Director of Development, Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services)*

This item contains exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 namely. para 3.

**Type of decision**

For information.

**Purpose of report**

To satisfy the requirements of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules with regard to the Finance and Policy Committee:

- Receiving and examining quarterly reports on the outcome of contract letting procedures including those where the lowest/highest price is not payable/receivable.
- Receiving and examining reports on any exemptions granted in respect of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

**Issue(s) for consideration**

Members highlighted a number of specific contracts and commented that some of the contract figures set out didn't match with the companies listed and that they didn't always correspond to the lowest price received. The Executive Director stated that (in accordance with the Constitution) the companies submitting tenders were listed alphabetically for each contract and the sums of the tenders submitted were listed in ascending price order (where this was the sole criteria for awarding the contract). This was to protect the commercial operation of the companies. Members asked for a clearer marking of the lowest tenders and tenderers on future reports.

**Decision**

That the report be noted.

The meeting returned to open session.

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

None.

The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm

**H MARTIN**

**DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

**PUBLICATION DATE: 3 OCTOBER 2023**