

Cabinet

A meeting of Cabinet was held on Thursday, 12th January, 2012.

Present: Cllr Robert Cook (Chairman), Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr David Coleman, Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr David Harrington, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr David Rose and Cllr Michael Smith

Officers: Julie Grant, Garry Cummings, Lesley King, Beccy Brown, Emma Chesworth (R); Paul Dobson, Richard Poundford, Julie Nixon, Mike Batty, Richard McGuckin (DNS); Jane Humphreys, Sean McEneaney, Diane McConnell (CESC); David Bond, Julie Grant, Michael Henderson (LD)

Also in attendance: Cllr Ken Lupton, Mark Kirkham (District Auditor), Catherine Andrew (Audit Manager)

Apologies:

CAB 101/11 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Mrs McCoy declared a personal, non prejudicial interest in the item entitled Economic Climate Update Report as she served on the Stockton and District Advice and Information Service Board.

Councillor Coleman and Councillor Rose declared a personal, non prejudicial interest in the Item entitled Personalisation Update as they were members of the Catalyst Board

Councillors Beall, Coleman, Cook, Dixon, Harrington, Mrs McCoy, Nelson, Rose, Smith and Lupton declared a personal, non prejudicial interest in the item entitled Members' Allowances as they were each entitled to receive some of the allowances under discussion.

Councillor Coleman and Councillor Rose declared a personal, non prejudicial interest in the Item entitled Voluntary Sector Support as they were members of the Catalyst Board.

Councillor Beall declared a personal, non prejudicial interest in the item entitled Voluntary Sector Support as he was Chair of Eastern Ravens Trust.

CAB 102/11 **Minutes of the meetings held on 1 December 2011 and 8 December 2011.**

The minutes of the meetings of Cabinet held on 1 and 8 December 2011 were agreed subject to the following amendment, to the decision element of minute CAB 96/11, of the meeting held on 1 December 2011, to the effect that it reads as follows:

"RESOLVED that

1. the post of Head of Communications and Head of Human Resources be amalgamated to form a joint Head of Service Post.
2. the grade of the post be established through the Council's job evaluation process

RECOMMENDED to Council that:-

3. the proposed Appointment Panel arrangements be approved."

**CAB
103/11** **Annual Audit Letter**

Cabinet considered a report that presented the Audit Commission's Annual Audit Letter for 2010/11.

Representatives from the Commission were in attendance to introduce the report and answer any questions.

The Audit Commission had issued an unqualified audit opinion on the Council's financial statements for 2010/11. The Council was putting in place measures to ensure that statements were reviewed internally before being passed for audit.

The Commission had issued an unqualified value for money conclusion stating that it is satisfied that "in all significant respects, Stockton on Tees Borough Council put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ending 31 March 2011".

It considers that "overall, the Council had managed the significant financial challenges it had faced well, managing within budget and successfully delivering planned savings and efficiencies" and that "the Council is taking difficult decisions to safeguard its future financial strength and capacity to deliver services".

RESOLVED that the contents of the letter be noted.

**CAB
104/11** **EIT Review of Legal Services**

Cabinet considered a report that set out the findings of the Executive Scrutiny Select Committee following the EIT review of Legal Services.

The Executive Scrutiny Select Committee received updates at key stages for independent challenge and was presented with the final report for comment at its meeting on 20 December, prior to consideration by Cabinet.

The Select Committee supported the recommendations following discussion around the key topics set out in the report.

It was explained that the review had concentrated on:-

- The provision of internal Legal Services
- The provision of external Legal Services
- The Local Land Charges Service

Cabinet noted the approach adopted in undertaking the review. Officers had been mindful of the need to make savings that may benefit other service groups, particularly Children, Education and Social Care where the demand for Legal Services was continuing to increase, particularly in Safeguarding. In terms of improvement and transformation, consideration had been given to linkages with other services, specifically Local Land Charges links with planning, GIS and Land Ownership Records.

As a support service, Legal Services was aware of the impact the service had on the delivery of the Council's key priorities and would often realign its resources to match Council objectives. Due to the increase in safeguarding work the Service had reduced the support to the Litigation Team by moving a Solicitor to the Child Protection Team. Cabinet noted that the legal priorities for 2011/12 were:-

- Achieving a balanced budget
- Safeguarding
- Delivering regeneration projects and the Schools Capital Programme

It was noted that the service had already reduced its resources by 19% by not filling vacant posts and early retirements, however the reliance on Legal Services had increased, both internally and externally. Members were provided with details of a number of the pressures faced by the service.

Members were informed of issues relating to Local Land Charges and noted that costs may be reduced in this area by automating access to all the Council's property search information.

Cabinet noted costs associated with the use of external solicitors on major projects and Barristers for specialist advice and advocacy. It was considered that a procurement exercise for Barristers would help demonstrate that the Council was receiving cost effective services in this regard.

RESOLVED that

1. the current in-house Legal Service be maintained taking account of 19% reductions in budget made to date.

2. the management of all the Council's spatial data sets be reviewed to ascertain if further efficiencies or improvements could be gained by consolidating these services.

3. a tender exercise for the procurement of services provided by barristers be undertaken.

CAB 105/11 EIT GATEWAY REVIEW OF BENEFIT SERVICE

Cabinet considered a report detailing a Gateway EIT Review conducted to identify options for efficiencies and, improvement within the Benefit Service. The review had been reported to the Housing and Community Safety Select Committee.

It was explained that the continuing uncertainty over the future of the service, as a result of the Welfare Reform Bill proposals, for the introduction of Universal Credit, published in February 2011, meant that there were significant risks associated with committing to any long term improvement arrangements and therefore the review had concentrated upon identifying improvements and efficiencies which could be made immediately, without investment in new technology or any requirement for significant service reconfiguration. The

priority would be to protect claim processing performance whilst still ensuring that the process was secure. Efficiencies would be achieved by eliminating work which, over time, with a shifting agenda was no longer necessary, automating some straightforward work and providing a simpler and more direct service to customers. The review had identified potential savings of £180,000 from a service restructure with a further £100,000 income generated from increased overpayment recovery.

When details of the DWP national transition strategy to Universal Credit were published, a local transition strategy would be developed, and reports presented to Cabinet at that time.

RESOLVED that

1. the benefit service be restructured, with estimated savings of £180,000 per annum (excluding any potential redundancy costs). The start of formal consultation with unions and employees be approved and authority be delegated to the Head of Housing in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety to implement the new structure on completion of the consultation.

2. arrangements for the recovery of old outstanding housing benefit overpayments are approved in accordance with established processes outlined in paragraph 21, with anticipated additional income collected of £100,000 per annum.

3. no new cases be accepted onto the Combined Payments Scheme.

4. Members endorse the trial to determine the effectiveness of using the Community Protection Service's Enforcement Officers to collect outstanding overpayment debt which is unsuitable for recovery by other methods. The team have experience of debt collection and currently collect unpaid Fixed Penalty Notices for a range of offences including littering and dog fouling.

5. Further reports be presented to Cabinet relating to the local transition strategy to Universal Credit and the proposed Localisation of Support for Council Tax when more detail of the government proposals are available.

CAB **LA Nominations**
106/11

In accordance with the procedure for the appointment of school governors, approved at Minute 84 of the Cabinet (11th May 2000), Cabinet were requested to approve the nomination to school Governing Body as detailed within the report.

RESOLVED that appointment be made to the vacant Governorship subject to successful List 99 check and Personal Disclosure, as follows:-

Bader Primary School – Mrs S Brown and Mrs L Featherstone
Bowesfield Primary School – Deborah Wray
Joint Management Committee Green Gates and Bishopton Centre – Nigel Chilton
St. John the Baptist CE Primary School – Cllr D Wilburn

CAB
107/11 **Education Act 2011**

Cabinet considered a report that updated Cabinet on the content of the Education Act 2011 and, in particular, those aspects that impacted upon the statutory role and responsibilities of the local authority.

The key changes for local authorities encapsulated in the legislation were:

- enables a new entitlement for disadvantaged two-year-olds to 15 hours' free early years education
- replaces independent appeals panels for exclusions with independent review panels
- removes the duty on local authorities to appoint a School Improvement Partner for every school
- gives precedence to academy proposals, where a local authority identifies the need for a new school, and expands the academies programme to allow 16-19 and alternative provision academies
- extends the Secretary of State's powers to intervene in underperforming schools
- provides for the closure of the Local Government Ombudsman's school complaints service, and removes the duty to consider complaints about the curriculum from LAs. General complaints about schools will now be made to the Secretary of State
- allows for pilots of direct payments for SEN education services
- makes changes to LA powers over sixth form colleges
- provides for the abolition of five arm's length bodies (the TDA, the GTCE, the QCDA, the YPLA and the SSSNB)

The Act no longer makes the changes to the section 10 Children Act duty to co-operate with the local authority to promote children's wellbeing, as had been included in the Education Bill.

Cabinet remarked on the large number of powers that had been given to the Secretary of State.

RESOLVED that the provisions as set out in the Education Act 2011 be noted.

CAB
108/11 **Economic Climate Update Report**

Cabinet considered a monthly update report providing members with an overview of the current economic climate, outlining the effects that this was having on Stockton Borough, and the mitigations already in place and those being developed.

Members noted some of the positive and negative developments since the last report. Details of the support on offer to people and businesses was also provided.

Members noted that some narrative explaining the issues behind the economic indicators and key statistics would be provided with the next report.

RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted and the work being undertaken supported.

**CAB
109/11**

The Appointment of Director of Public Health (DPH) Stockton

Consideration was given to a report that outlined the proposed changes for Public Health functions in the future and sought approval to recruit to the post of Director of Public Health (DPH) for Stockton.

The White Paper "Equity and Excellence" proposed major changes in the arrangements for the delivery of Public Health functions in England and the Government's intended changes were further developed in the Public Health Consultation paper "Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our Strategy for Public Health in England" (November 2010).

Key proposed changes were:

- PCTs and SHAs are to be abolished by April 2013.
- Responsibility for strategic planning and commissioning of NHS services is proposed to transfer to the NHS Commissioning Board (NHSCB) and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs).
- Responsibility for Health Improvement and Health Protection was to be retained by the Secretary of State to be discharged through Public Health England (PHE). This may include commissioning of some Public Health services through the NHSCB.
- Local Authorities would be given a statutory duty and a ring-fenced budget to improve and protect the health of their population.
- Local Authorities would establish Health and Wellbeing Boards, responsible for Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and high level strategic plans for Health and Wellbeing.

"Healthy People, Healthy Lives: Our Strategy for Public Health in England", set out a vision for the future of Public Health and also the role of the Director of Public Health (DPH).

The Government was clear that Directors of Public Health would be employed by Local Authorities in 2013, but the appointment process would be a joint process with Public Health England, who would be able to ensure that only appropriately qualified individuals were appointed and would continue to provide them with professional support and advice. It was proposed that the following Council representatives were part of the Appointment Panel:-

- Leader of the Council
- Deputy Leader (Cabinet Member for Adult Services & Health)
- Chief Executive
- Corporate Director - Children, Education and Social Care

The guidance stated that it was a matter for Local Authorities to determine the precise detail of their Corporate Management arrangements, however, given the importance of these new local Public Health functions, the leadership position of

the DPH in the local community and the critical health protection functions to be carried out by the DPH on behalf of the Local Authority, they would expect the DPH to be of Chief Officer status with direct accountability to the Chief Executive.

There was some suggestion that the Health and Social Care Bill may explicitly say that the DPH had an appropriate status within the Local Authority in line with the position of Director of Children's Services for example and that an amendment to the Bill would give the Secretary of State the power to issue statutory guidance to the effect that DPH should report directly to Chief Executive.

There had been work undertaken in the Tees Valley to look at options for appointing and covering the functions of Directors of Public Health across the Tees Valley Local Authorities.

Further guidance from the Director of Public Health NHS North of England indicated that approval to share a DPH post across Local Authorities would not receive approval, unless the Local Authorities wishing to share a role had other similar shared services and a shared Health and Wellbeing Board. This was not the case across Tees/Tees Valley.

The options appraisal undertaken by the Tees Valley Chief Executives subsequently determined that each of the Tees Valley Local Authorities would employ their own Director of Public Health.

The appointment of a Director of Public Health in Stockton would also ensure that in the transition year 2012/13 there was additional capacity to ensure the transition arrangements were embedded.

The options appraisal also considered whether a number of the Public Health functions, which were provided centrally by the PCT Public Health Team, could continue to be provided across the Tees/Tees Valley. These included the following for example:-

- Public Health Intelligence
- Screening
- Immunization
- Seasonal Flu
- Research
- Health Needs Assessment

The options appraisal proposed that post 2013 the Local Authorities commission these services on a shared basis with other Local Authorities across Tees or Tees Valley. It had also been proposed that these services would be hosted by one of the Local Authorities still to be determined.

It was also envisaged that each DPH would have some delivery teams within their Local Authority and that there would be agreement to lead on key works teams between Local Authorities.

There would also be Public Health services that were commissioned or resourced to participate in were committed to on a much wider scale than just

the Tees/Tees Valley Local Authorities i.e.

Fresh - Regional Tobacco Office
BALANCE - Regional Alcohol Office

The progression of recruitment of the DPH post was one element of the range of changes that would be part of the Public Health transition to the Local Authority. Further details around the transition plan would be brought to Cabinet in March 2012 which would outline the local arrangements that would be required to be in place to address these proposals.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The recruitment of the post of Director of Public Health be agreed and that this be a joint recruitment process involving Public Health England, NHS Tees and Stockton Borough Council.
2. The proposed appointment process from the Faculty of Public Health (attached as Appendix 1 to the report) be noted.

CAB **Personalisation Update**
110/11

Cabinet considered a report that provided an update on progress in Stockton-on-Tees for the developments of the Personalisation agenda within adult social care services and in line with the direction of travel over the last two years based on the earlier 'Putting People First' and more recent 'Think Local, Act Personal' concordats.

Work had progressed on the development of a Resource Allocation System and Personal Needs Questionnaire, which was enabling people to self-direct their support by offering an upfront budget allocation and supporting them to complete a costed support plan which explained how they wished to receive support services in future. This process was impacting positively on the Council's ability to manage social care assessments and meet new performance targets.

Examples of two cases given Personal Budgets were provided.

RESOLVED that the direction of travel and progress to date, associated with the Resource Allocation System and the Personal Needs Questionnaire, be noted.

CAB **Voluntary Sector Support**
111/11

Consideration was given to a report on the package of support provided by the Council to the voluntary and community sector. The package of support was developed following a review of the Voluntary Sector Support Fund (also referred to as 'core funding'). The report included an early internal evaluation of the Stockton Investment Fund aspect of the support package. Stockton Council was independently nominated and successful in securing the North East Empowering Communities Award. The support package for the Voluntary and Community Sector was credited as the reason Stockton-on Tees Borough Council was awarded this by the regional Voluntary Organisation North East.

In November 2010, following extensive consultation with the voluntary and community sector, Cabinet approved a fundamental change to the way the Council financially supported local VCS organisations in terms of 'core' funding.

The outcome was the establishment of the Stockton Investment Fund which was implemented in the financial year 2011-12 as part of a wider package of support to the VCS arising from the EIT review of community engagement, at a time when other Councils across the country were withdrawing core funding from the voluntary and community sector.

The package of support to the VCS from the council was aimed at supporting the development and sustainability of a vibrant voluntary and community sector that was:-

- well placed to access public (and private) sector commissioning opportunities
- less reliant on grant funding which is diminishing in the current economic climate
- supported at an appropriate level to enhance the engagement and empowerment of local communities in influencing the policies and decisions of public sector organisations

The report detailed the current support package:-

- The Stockton Investment Fund
- The Stockton Community Fund
- The VCS workshop programme
- The Community Empowerment Network
- My Community Webpages on SBC website
- SBC Community Asset Transfer Strategy
- Access to the Community Engagement Team

RESOLVED that:-

1. the report be noted.

2.a further update report reviewing the investment fund in particular and the wider support package be presented to a future Cabinet.

CAB **Family Poverty Framework Report**
112/11

Cabinet considered a report that provided an update on the Family Poverty Framework, outlined recent developments in government policy, highlighted a number of key issues and sought recommendations for next steps.

It was explained that the draft Family Poverty Framework contained a number of objectives , namely:

- Facilitating the employment and skills development of parents
- Information, advice and support for children and parents
- Health, education, childcare and social services
- Housing, environment and promoting social inclusion

The framework document formed the basis of a consultation event with Renaissance. The event was attended by 50 key delegates from across the Renaissance family of partnerships.

The outcome from the event showed that whilst there were some ambitions included in the original framework which were supported, overall the draft was seen as too general and all encompassing and needed to be more ambitious in its tone. There was also a strong suggestion that the document proposed a universal approach to tackling family poverty which would be difficult to achieve given the current financial climate. It identified that there was a need to be far more targeted. Since the consultation event took place the programme of EIT reviews within the Council had resulted in outcomes that were implementing a more targeted approach. For example, the Early Intervention Grant Review.

Since the production of the original draft Framework and the consultation event with Stockton Renaissance the national picture had changed significantly, not least in terms of central government policy, the publication of a number of relevant reviews and research and a much reduced financial settlement across all public sector organisations.

The Coalition Government's policy framework with regard to family poverty had also become clearer and this was now documented in the framework.

The Government also instigated a number of relevant reviews which had concluded and reported and the findings had been taken into consideration.

Members requested that the framework include reference to fuel poverty.

All of the factors outlined above had been taken into account and a revised draft framework produced, which was provided to Cabinet.

In order to complete the framework document and secure the appropriate approvals the following timescale was being proposed:

- a. Draft framework document to Cabinet (12th January 2012) seeking approval for the general principles and agreement to undertake a child/family poverty needs assessment using the nationally available toolkit
- b. Population of the detailed actions to be drawn from the Council Plan (2012/13) and other identified plans/strategies including the identification of some agreed measures of success
- c. Further consultation with Stockton Renaissance (potential to include in the Renaissance event being planned for March 2012)
- d. Final Family Poverty Framework document for sign off by Cabinet in April/May 2012.

RESOLVED that

1. the report and changes in government policy be noted.
2. the next steps/timescales as outlined above, and at paragraph 8 of the report, be agreed.

113/11

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meetings of various bodies.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the following meetings be received/approved, as appropriate:-

Eastern Area Partnership Board – 18 October 2011
Western Area Partnership Board – 31 October 2011

CAB Members' Allowances

114/11

Cabinet considered a report of the Independent Members' Allowances Remuneration Panel.

Members were asked to consider the Panel's report and, in particular, its recommendations. It was noted that Council would consider any recommendations from Cabinet, at its meeting on 18 January 2012.

Cabinet supported many of the principles outlined in the Panel's report and recommendations, however, alternative proposals were submitted which Members considered, would be appropriate to Stockton on Tees Borough Council.

The proposals were:

1. An overall budget reduction of 4% for 2012/13;
2. Basic Allowance (and Co-optee Allowance) frozen, reflecting employee position; for the period of this scheme, the Basic Allowance would be adjusted annually in accordance with National Joint Council for Local Government Employees . The period of the scheme would be 2012/13 to 2014/15 inclusively.
3. All Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) to be linked in % terms to the Leader's Allowance

i.	Deputy Leader	55%	(w.e.f. 1.6.11)
ii.	Cabinet Members	45%	
iii.	Chairs	25%	
iv.	Vice Chairs	12½%	
v.	Other Groups	45%	in total

Leader's Allowance to be linked as per the Basic Allowance with the consequent adjustment to SRAs.
4. Group Leaders Allowances to be apportioned on Council seats won at election, rather than votes, with a minimum of 3 seats comprising a Group (5% of total, rounded up).
5. All Chairs and Vice Chairs to receive the same respective SRAs

6. No Councillor to receive more than one SRA from the Council with the exception of Mayoral Allowances; where a Councillor occupied two qualifying positions, then only the higher allowance be paid. The element of this proposal relating to a Councillor receiving no more than one SRA from the Council would, however, be the subject of further consultation.

7. Child Care and Dependent Carers' Allowances – no change.

8. 4% reduction to Mayoral & Deputy Mayoral Allowances, in line with savings elsewhere;

9. No change to Travel, Subsistence and Pensions.

Members noted the financial implications of the proposals for 2012/13, which would see a saving of £34,300:

Basic	- £9,300
Leader	- £26,800
Deputy Leader	- £14,740
Cabinet Member	- £12,060
Committee Chair	- £6,700
Committee Vice Chair	- £3,350
Leader, Conservative	- £5,360
Leader IBIS	- £2,680
Leader TIA	- £2,233
Leader Lib Dem	- £1,787
Leader BIA	- £0
Mayor	- £16,800
Deputy Mayor	- £5,280
Co opted	- £650

RECOMMENDED to Council that

- 1. it approve the proposals, as detailed above.**
- 2. further consultation takes place, as detailed at 6 above.**

CAB **Police & Crime Commissioners and Police & Crime Panels**
115/11

Cabinet received a report that outlined the position in respect of Police and

Crime Commissioners and Police and Crime Panels as a result of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011.

It was explained that the Act provided for the election of a Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for all provincial Police forces in England and Wales, and for the establishment of a Police and Crime Panel (PCP) to scrutinise the functions of the Commissioner.

Members were provided with details of the various legal powers, duties, responsibilities and other issues associated with the new arrangements.

It was proposed that the initial composition of the Cleveland Police & Crime Panel be as follows:-

(a) Hartlepool Borough Council	– two Elected Members
(b) Middlesbrough Borough Council	– three Elected Members
(c) Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council	– three Elected Members
(d) Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council	- four Elected Members
	Total

12 Elected Members

Ten of the Elected Members would be direct nominees of individual Local Authorities and the remaining two would need to be co-opted by the original ten. The core members of the Panel would also be responsible for co-opting independent members (a minimum of two and a maximum of eight). Secretary of State approval would be required for more than two co-optees i.e. the two 'extra' Elected Members plus the two 'independents'. It was proposed that all twelve Elected Members should have equal voting rights, including the opportunity to elect or be elected as Chair or Vice Chair, and serve the same term of office. It was a requirement of the legislation that the 12 Elected Members should represent the political composition of the four Local Authorities.

One possible solution, based on current numbers was provided to members at an appendix to the report.

It was also proposed that Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council would act as lead authority for the Cleveland Police & Crime Panel.

Finally, it was proposed that the Cleveland Police & Crime Panel and the Durham & Darlington Police & Crime Panel extend reciprocal observer arrangements, i.e. one or more members of each panel would be invited to sit as an observer at the meetings of the other Panel.

It was explained that the proposals set out above and at paragraphs 9 to 11 of the report had been discussed and supported at a meeting of the Tees Valley Chief Executives Group on 17 August 2011.

Current police authorities would oversee effective transition to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and creation of Police and Crime Panels. They would therefore need to:

(a) plan and deliver an effective transition programme whilst recognising that the effective delivery of police authority and force business continued to remain paramount.

(b) be mindful of the continuing ongoing challenges facing police authorities and the police service, particularly the current difficult financial context, to continue secure value for money and financial efficiencies.

The Home Office had established a Police and Crime Commissioners Transition Programme Sponsorship Board, chaired by the Minister for Policing and Criminal Justice, Nick Herbert MP. Board membership consisted of key policing bodies: the Association of Police Authorities: Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO); Association of Police Authority Chief Executives (APACE); Association of Police Authority Treasurers (PATs) and the Local Government Association (LGA).

A number of projects were ongoing and the Board would work with the Government to facilitate effective transition from Police Authorities to PCCs. Work in progress included:

(a) The Strategic Policing Requirement which would bridge the local policing agenda with regional and national policing needs.

(b) A Protocol setting out parameters within which the PCC and Chief Constable would deliver and govern.

(c) A policy on complaints against PCCs.

(d) A Financial Management Code of Practice which PCCs must comply with; and

(e) Agreement of transfer schemes setting out how assets, staff and liabilities would transfer to new arrangements.

RECOMMENDED to Council that

1. the report be noted.

2. the proposed composition of the Cleveland Police & Crime Panel, i.e. two Councillors from Hartlepool, three from Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland, and four from Stockton-on-Tees, be approved (this will involve seeking Secretary of State approval to go beyond the default option of 10 Councillors).

3. the proposal for Stockton to act as lead authority in respect of the Panel be approved.

4. the Cleveland Police & Crime Panel will have reciprocal observer arrangements with the Durham & Darlington Police & Crime Panel.

5. a further report detailing the rules of procedure and financial arrangements for the Panel be received.

**CAB Review of Council's Petition Scheme
116/11**

Cabinet considered a report relating to the Council's Petition Scheme.

It was explained that in the period of just over a year following the introduction of the Council's new petition scheme in July 2010, a total of 13 paper petitions had been received.

2 petitions received exceeded the 2000 signature threshold required to trigger debate by full Council. For each of these meetings, additional resources were deployed to ensure the smooth hearing of these petitions. Pre-planning and facilitation of public and petitioner attendance, in addition to technical support where required, ensured that all parties were dealt with successfully. A draft procedure was also produced to assist Council in its consideration of each petition. It was evident however that there was some uncertainty at the conclusion of each debate as to what further action, if any, the Council intended to take on each petition, and this therefore highlighted a need for clarity for future situations to ensure that there was certainty regarding 'what will happen next' to each petition.

As part of the Council's new petition scheme, it was also agreed that an electronic petition scheme be procured and developed. This was completed and made available on the Council's website to the public in December 2010. Whilst no electronic petitions had as yet been received, the facility was utilised to indicate the details of all of the hard copy petitions received by the Council, and stated what action had been taken.

Neighbouring authorities were contacted to enable us to compare the responses they had received since the implementation of their new petition schemes. The number of petitions received by the other Tees Valley Authorities was in the main less than Stockton, with only Middlesbrough having received a similar amount. None of the other Tees Valley authorities had received a petition that exceeded their threshold for triggering a full Council debate.

Members heard that since the introduction of the Council's new Petition Scheme Stockton had seen an increase in the number of petitions submitted. However, the actual number of petitions received was still fairly small in number.

It was also evident that after consideration of the petitions submitted that the quantity of valid signatures received was in some cases low in comparison to the number of people who had signed the petitions. It was highlighted that unless the public visited the information contained on the Council's website prior to commencing their petition and read the guidance, they would not see the criteria a valid petition needed to meet and could often therefore be unaware that the format or content of part of their petition might be invalid. It was suggested that regular advice could be included within Stockton News outlining the conditions and requirements of the Council's Petition Scheme, for information could also be available within the Council's Contact Centre and information could also be featured on the Council's website and Councillor web pages. The promotion of the scheme would also highlight to the public the option available to them for submitting petitions electronically.

From experience gained regarding the handling of the two petitions received that triggered a debate at full Council, difficulties were encountered in determining the number of members of the public who would attend the full Council meetings. This created a dilemma in terms of choice of meeting venue.

If it was established that any more than 10 additional persons would be expected to attend full Council, it would be likely in each case that an alternative venue to the Council Chamber would be required to be found in order to accommodate all members, officers and the public. This could therefore result in the hire of a third party venue, with a small financial implication associated.

It was finally noted that to date, no requests had been received from petitioners dissatisfied with the Council's response to their petition, which would give some indication that the scheme was working reasonably well.

RECOMMENDED to Council that:

- 1. the findings presented from the review of the Council's Petition Scheme be noted.**
- 2. the Council continue to operate the scheme and seek to increase public awareness and understanding of its criteria via the community engagement and promotion initiatives outlined.**
- 3. the further action identified as being necessary to ensure clarity of outcomes arising from a Council debate on a petition, be noted.**