

Cabinet

A meeting of Cabinet was held on Thursday, 12th September, 2019.

Present: Cllr Bob Cook (Chair); Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Lisa Evans , Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy and Cllr Steve Nelson.

Officers: Julie Danks (MD), Beccy Brown, Ged Morton (HR&L), Garry Cummings (F&BS), Richard McGuckin (ED&D), Reuben Kench (C,L&E), Dave Willingham (CS), Margaret Waggott, Peter Bell (DS).

Also in attendance: Cllr Sylvia Walmsley (Chair of Executive Scrutiny Committee), Cllr Clare Gamble, Cllr Norma Stephenson, Cllr Carol Clark.

Apologies: Cllr Mike Smith.

CAB 28/19

Welcome and Evacuation Procedure

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and the evacuation procedure was noted.

CAB 29/19

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Steve Nelson declared a personal non prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 5 – Targeted Action Areas Update as he was a Board Member of Thirteen and Catalyst.

Councillor Nigel Cooke declared a personal non prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 8 - Financial Update and Medium Term Financial Plan (2019/20 Quarter 1) as he was a non-remunerated Board Member of Tees Valley Music Alliance.

Councillor Bob Cook declared a personal non prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 10 – Minutes of Various Bodies as he was a member of the TVCA Cabinet.

Councillor Steve Nelson declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of agenda item 13 – Tees Valley Lettings Partnership as he was a Board Member of Thirteen. Councillor Steve Nelson withdrew from the meeting and left the room during consideration of the item.

Councillor Steve Nelson declared a personal non prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 16 - Supplementary Planning Documents – Update as he was a Board Member of Thirteen.

CAB 30/19

Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2019.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2019 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

CAB 31/19

Targeted Action Area Progress Report

Consideration was given to a report that gave an update on the Targeted Action

Areas.

Approval was granted in November 2017 to implement an area based, targeted intervention approach which would provide a visible, neighbourhood management presence to some of the boroughs more vulnerable local communities in the central Stockton and the Victoria area in Thornaby. Both areas experience high concentrations of low value private rented housing, high numbers of empty properties and were hotspots for crime and anti-social behaviour.

The report updated Cabinet on a range of initiatives ongoing within the Targeted Action Areas and the positive discussions which had been ongoing with a group of private sector landlords 'PLuSS' (Private Landlords Supporting Stockton) to work collaboratively to drive up property and management standards within the private rental sector. Cabinet were asked to approve the establishment of a new landlord led membership scheme and note the robust approach the Council would take with landlords operating within the two Targeted Action Areas who chose not to become members of the new scheme and who failed to manage and maintain their properties in accordance with statutory regulations.

With regard to the next steps the below provides an indicative timeline for the implementation of the proposed new approach:

Invite applications for new scheme - Late September 2019
Marketing and promotion of new scheme - Late September 2019 / ongoing
PLuSS Website live - Late September 2019
Scheme operational - Early October 2019
6 Month review of scheme operation April 2020

Prior formal commencement of the new landlord-led membership scheme, the Council would determine a range of outcomes which this scheme would be evaluated against and an evaluation report would be presented back Cabinet. Should this new landlord led scheme not deliver its anticipated outcomes (i.e. landlords choose not to join / conditions of property condition and management are not improved etc.) then the option of exploring a selective licensing scheme may again be considered by the Council.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The impact of a range of initiatives that have been delivered to date (with the support of local communicates and partner agencies) which have had a positive and successful impact in both central Stockton and the Victoria area of Thornaby be noted.
2. The Council's approach to working collaboratively with PLuSS (Private Landlords Supporting Stockton) to deliver a landlord led membership scheme within the Targeted Action Areas together with the robust enforcement approach for those private sector landlords who choose to remain outside of the new scheme be approved. A review of outcomes will be presented back to Cabinet.

Consideration was given to a report on the success of our 2019 Apprenticeship Programme.

In May 2019 the Council set out to recruit to over 40 new Apprenticeship opportunities across a range of Council services. The approach to recruitment and selection was innovative and proved extremely successful with the appointment of 42 motivated and enthusiastic apprentices who were all looking for a rewarding career and a chance to support the people of the Borough. The new apprentices started their employment on Monday 9 September 2019 and attended a special corporate induction session on 12 September 2019.

The success of the programme would not have been achieved without the positive support received from Council Employees, Senior Managers, CMT and Councillors. It had been a very rewarding endeavour carried out in challenging times, and highlighted the commitment to create a resilient workforce and to deliver continuous improvement across services. It was proposed to replicate and build on the success of the programme with a further annual apprenticeship programme in 2020.

**CAB
33/19**

Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy

Consideration was given to a report that provided a background to existing arrangements for managing complaints / customer feedback, the detail of the review of the current policy, suggested changes and next steps with respect to the implementation of the revised policy.

The Council's existing Corporate Compliments, Commendations, Comments and Complaints policy and procedure was due for a periodic review. Although many aspects of the policy were effective in managing the expectations of customers, maintaining satisfactory response rates and supporting an approach to early resolution and learning, some aspects were no longer as effective in meeting changing customer needs, responding to national trends and simplifying the process in response to customer feedback. Recent outcomes / recommendations and good practice guidance issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, also supported the need to review the existing policy.

The management / coordination of complaints, comments and commendations was managed and recorded centrally, with a few exceptions. A dedicated complaints telephone line, an email account and online web forms were the main means by which customers could make a complaint and or provide feedback. Social Media sites were also a valuable source of customer feedback although official complaints received via social media were redirected to the website or a complaints telephone line.

Complaints were logged and recorded on one system and all related correspondence retained. This provided a strategic oversight of customer feedback and reports from the system enable intelligence to be used to effectively manage and monitor timeliness of responses, escalation rates through the various stages of the complaint process, upheld rates and learning.

It was proposed that the revised policy be rolled out from 1st October 2019. The

council web pages would be updated with the new policy, additional guidance and support information. Council staff would receive training, awareness raising and guidance. Monitoring of the changes would take place to ensure these were working effectively. Reports on progress would be received by the Corporate Governance Group and Senior Management. The Policy would be reviewed periodically.

RESOLVED that the Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy be approved with effect from 1 October 2019.

CAB 34/19 Financial Update and Medium Term Financial Plan (2019/20 Quarter 1)

Consideration was given to a report that summarised the Council's financial performance and position at the end of the first quarter of the 2019/20 financial year and updated the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) accordingly.

Projected financial pressures amounting to £1,268,000 were evident based on information for the first three months of the financial year. Many of the pressures related to Children's Services. The report also included an update on the issues facing Children's Services and the activities underway. The position would continue to be closely monitored and managed throughout the remainder of the financial year.

The report also presented an update on the Capital Programme. No significant programme revisions were reported in the first Quarter 2019/20.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The update to the Medium Term Financial Plan and the current level of General Fund balances be noted.
2. The revised Capital programme at Appendix A of the report be noted.

CAB 35/19 Investors In People (IIP) Annual Review 2019

Consideration was given to a report on Investors In People (IIP) Annual Review 2019.

The Investors in People (IIP) award set out the criteria for high performance through people. The Council had held the IIP Accredited award since 2003 and had maintained accreditation ever since. The Council were most recently accredited in July 2018 and awarded the Investors in People Standard.

The Council was required to undertake annual reviews at the 12 and 24 month anniversary of the accreditation. The annual review was a valuable opportunity for the Council to consider progress and assess the current position against the IIP Standards. The annual review considered evidence from Senior Managers within the organisation and from our employees on an individual and group basis. The 12 month review took place in July 2019 and as a result the Council continued to be recognised as an Investors in People organisation.

Evidence gathered during Interviews provided significant evidence of good practice across all Indicators of the Standard and feedback in the report and directly from the Assessor was excellent. The review again highlighted that the Council was working beyond the 'Developed' level in many areas.

It was particularly pleasing to receive such positive feedback and recognition of the Council's ambition and approach to valuing the workforce, notwithstanding the significant financial challenge and change, that the organisation and employees had been part of over the recent years.

**CAB
36/19** **Minutes of Various Bodies**

In accordance with the Council's Constitution or previous practice the minutes of the meeting of the bodies indicated below were submitted to Members for consideration:-

Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board – 20 June 2019
Tees Valley Combined Authority – 15 March 2019
Tees Valley Combined Authority – 28 June 2019

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings detailed in the appendices be approved / received, as appropriate.

**CAB
37/19** **Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaints – The Local Authority Report for Stockton-on-Tees 2018/19**

Consideration was given to a report that provided the details of the Ombudsman's annual review letter for the Council for 2018/19. Of 48 enquiries received, the Ombudsman made decisions in 43 cases with only 13 of these resulting in a detailed investigation. Of the 13 investigations, five complaints were upheld. All recommendations made by the Ombudsman had been implemented.

The Ombudsman had published the annual summary of statistics on the complaints and enquiries received about the Council and the decisions made in that respect for the year ended 31 March 2019.

It was positive to note that, whilst all complaints were considered very seriously, and all recommendations and learning were adopted, there had been no formal public interest reports issued during the year. Of the 48 complaints and enquiries received by the Ombudsman in 2018/19 a total of 13 received a detailed investigation, with only 5 of the 13 complaints being upheld.

A copy of the 2019 review letter which included the table of statistics was attached to the report. A copy of the 2017/18 statistics table was also attached to the report for comparison purposes.

When comparing the two statistics tables, it could be seen that there had been an increase in the number of complaints / enquiries received by the Ombudsman (from 32 to 48). Within this overall performance:

- All service areas had recorded at least one enquiry.
- Adult Social Care, Benefits and Council Tax and Highways and Transportation had seen the biggest increase from last year.
- There had been a slight reduction (by 1) in Corporate and Other, Education and Children's Social Care and Environmental Services.

The number of decisions made by the Ombudsman in 2018/19 increased from 29 in 2017/18 to 43 in 2018/19 with the number of detailed investigations undertaken also increasing from 7 to 13. It was noted that despite an increase in both complaints / enquiries and detailed investigations the number of complaints upheld remained at 5 which was consistent with 2017/18.

There were robust procedures in place for dealing with complaints about Council services at an early stage. The annual report and figures suggested that despite an increase in enquires received by the Ombudsman, the Council was managing its early resolution processes well and in one of the 5 cases upheld, provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint was investigated by the Ombudsman. This approach significantly reduced the workload of the Ombudsman and subsequently the Local Authority. This approach was something that the Authority would look to improve further, particularly at the Stage 2 of the Corporate Procedure.

Of the 5 complaints upheld, four related to Education and Children's Services and one to Adult Care Services.

The 5 upheld complaints were remedied by the Council following the Ombudsman's involvement. It was noted that the remedies suggested by the Ombudsman were of a low level and included the provision of written apologies and financial contribution to the complainant. The Council's web site and associated complaint paperwork had also been strengthened to make it clear what support was available for those who required further assistance with Mental Health and Wellbeing matters.

A new statistic produced by the Ombudsman showed that 100% of the recommendations made by the Ombudsman with respect to any complaints upheld, had been actioned. This was something that the Ombudsman now followed up in a timely way and would be included as a statistic in future annual reports.

It was noted that all matters raised with the Ombudsman were reviewed at the Corporate Governance Steering Group and by the Councils Corporate Management Team quarterly, to ensure that all learning was shared and picked up by the relevant department

The Local Government Ombudsman's annual review of Local Government complaints for 2018/19 had been published and a copy of the complete report can be viewed on the LGO website. This provided a national context for Stockton's complaint and enquiry statistics.

The report showed that nationally:

- The number of complaints and enquiries received by the Ombudsman had increased from the previous year with some 16,899 complaints / enquiries

received a third of which related to Children Education and Adults Social Care. This was in line with Stockton figures, which mirror similar statistics.

- The number of detailed investigations upheld nationally increased to 58% from 57% last year. Although Stockton had more cases investigated the upheld rate remains the same at 5 cases. This was an improvement on the national trend.
- London had the highest upheld rate at 63% with the North East having the lowest upheld rate at 46%
- The North East had the highest proportion of Children Education and Adult Social Care Complaints with the East Midlands the lowest rate on both.

In summary Stockton was in line with National trends but maintained a lower level of cases upheld. This was a positive position considering the North East region made the highest level of complaints / enquiries particularly in the areas of Adults and Children's Social Care and Education. This suggested that the councils approach to dealing with and managing complaints was robust. Learning from this report and the trend in rising national figures, would be considered in future policy developments and staff training.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The report be noted which sets out that no formal public interest reports had been received,
2. The effective procedures be noted that remain in place to ensure that all learning from Ombudsman recommendations and findings take place.

CAB 38/19 **Customer Service Excellence (CSE)**

Consideration was given to a report on Customer Service Excellence (CSE).

CSE was a national quality mark that sought to reward organisations that demonstrate a customer-focused commitment to all that they do. Certification to the CSE standard was through a rigorous assessment process which included a review of documents that demonstrated compliance against each element of the standard and an on-site visit to observe practical evidence.

There were 5 criteria that must be satisfied with a number of elements within each. To achieve the Standard, the organisation must achieve full compliance or compliance plus in at least 80% of the elements contained in each of the criteria. Compliance plus was awarded for elements where particular strength was demonstrated.

Accreditation operated on a 3-year cycle, with a full assessment in year 1 followed up by 2 annual reviews to ensure standards were maintained. Stockton Council had been accredited with CSE since 2010 and had demonstrated continuous improvement through the assessment cycle. In the 2016 full assessment, the Council was awarded full accreditation with compliance plus in 9 elements.

The most recent full assessment was in June and July 2019, where staff from a range of Council services contributed supporting evidence and hosted visits for the assessors to observe practical examples.

As a result of the assessment the Council received certification for a further 3 years, achieving full compliance across all 57 aspects of assessment with compliance plus for 13 elements. During the on-site visit, the assessors were particularly impressed with the collaborative approach, the commitment to customers and the energy and enthusiasm of staff.

The full CSE assessment report was attached to the report.

**CAB
39/19** **Tees Valley Lettings Partnership**

Consideration was given to a report on the Tees Valley Lettings Partnership.

The Tees Valley Lettings Partnership was made up of eight voluntary partners (the five Tees Valley Local Authorities, Beyond Housing, North Star and Home Group), the partners worked collaboratively to let social and affordable housing properties as quickly as possible and in accordance with an agreed common allocation policy. The Partnership had undertaken a number of service reviews which had focused on ensuring that all partners deliver an efficient and effective property lettings service which addresses local housing need and that the ICT system used to deliver the service was responsive to both current and future customer needs.

Following the conclusion of above reviews, the report highlighted a recent consultation exercise undertaken by the Tees Valley Lettings Partnership to ensure that it has a fit for purpose Common Allocation Policy. Members supported the proposed changes to the Allocation Policy and noted the work that was ongoing to introduce a new digital lettings platform which would significantly improve the customer journey/experience.

RESOLVED that the recent consultation exercise undertaken to inform an updated Tees Valley Common Allocation policy be noted and the proposed changes to this policy as detailed in Appendix A of the report be approved.

**CAB
40/19** **Local Authority Governors on School / Academy Governing Bodies**

In accordance with the procedure for the appointment of school / academy governors, approved as Minute CAB 27/13 of the Cabinet (13 June 2013), Cabinet was invited to consider the following nominations to school / academy Governing Bodies.

The Glebe Primary School – Councillor Tony Riordan
Whitehouse Primary School – Aillean Dixon

RESOLVED that the above appointments be made to the vacant Governorships subject to successful List 99 check and Personal Disclosure.

CAB **Scrutiny End of Term Report 2015 – 2019**

41/19

Consideration was given to a report on the Scrutiny End-of-Term Report 2015-19.

The Scrutiny End of Term Report was produced for the period 2015-19 and was attached to the report. The Report highlighted the work of the Council's Select Committees during the last four years, and contained infographics which summarised each year's work programme in detail. These infographics function as each year's Annual Report.

The End of Term report was considered by each Select Committee prior to the Local Government Elections, and was circulated to the Executive Scrutiny Committee.

It was noted that review recommendations were made at a certain point in time, and naturally as the Report covered a four year period, a number of the issues covered had developed further.

Aside from those relating to a small number of more recently completed reviews, the majority of scrutiny recommendations from this period had been subject to monitoring by Select Committees and had been signed off as complete.

Production of the End of Term Report and consideration by Cabinet and Council (25 September 2019) supported the aims of the statutory Guidance. Consideration of the Report by Council also fulfilled the requirements of the Constitution.

CAB **Supplementary Planning Documents - Update**

42/19

Consideration was given to a report that updated Members of the preparation of new Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) and associated documents required to support the general implementation of newly adopted Stockton-on-Tees Local Plan (STLP) policies. It set out the statutory procedures and the programme and indicative timescales.

The National Planning Policy Framework defined a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) as:

'Documents which add further detail to the policies in the local Plan. They can be used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites, or on particular issues, such as design. Supplementary planning documents are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions but are not part of the development plan'.

The Council had eight SPDs and three Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) documents. These were out of date and in need of streamlining to reflect the approach and objectives of the newly adopted STLP. New documents would set out clear and effective methods of implementing planning

policies to aid colleagues, developers, the community and any other interested party.

Following a high level internal review, it was proposed to reduce the number of SPD/SPGS to four, as set out below:

- Housing SPD
- Householder Extensions and Alterations SPD
- Sustainable Design SPD
- Planning Obligations SPD

Details of existing SPDs and SPGs with their replacements, the key areas covered within them and those recommended for deletion as they are no longer relevant were attached to the report.

The production of SPD's could be a resource intensive exercise. Involved in the process was detailed internal consultation with colleagues and each SPD also required at least one round of public consultation, engagement and the production of the following documents:

- Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report (subject to five week external consultation)
- Equality Impact Assessment
- Consultation Statement

A period of consultation for each SPD was required. Briefing sessions would be held to ensure that all Members had the opportunity to see the SPDs and provide their feedback before they were presented to Council for adoption.

Comments received as part of the consultation would be considered and where necessary amendments would be made. Final drafts of the SPDs would then be considered by Cabinet for recommendation to Council for formal adoption.

The key milestones and indicative timescales for the production and adoption of SPD's was detailed within the report. The programme would take into account the requirements outlined above as well as advice from Development Management colleagues to identify which SPD's should be prioritised to ensure local residents and stakeholders had access to the most up to date guidance in accordance with the adopted Local Plan.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The contents of the report, in particular the key milestones and indicative timescales for completion of the programme of SPDs be noted.

RECOMMENDED to Council that:-

2. **Delegated authority be given to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing and Director of Economic Growth and Development to authorise the development and statutory consultation of the draft SPDs and to make any necessary amendments as a result of consultation comments received, prior to formal adoption of the final documents by Council.**

