

Cabinet

A meeting of Cabinet was held on Thursday, 17th November, 2022.

Present: Cllr Robert Cook (Chair), Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Michael Smith and Cllr Norma Stephenson O.B.E.

Officers: Mike Greene (MD), Ged Morton, Julie Butcher, Jonathan Nertney, Fiona Srogi, Peter Bell (CS), Garry Cummings (F,D&R&DMD), Reuben Kench, Lorraine Dixon (CS,E&C), Marc Stephenson, Leanne Maloney-Kelly (A&H), Martin Gray (ChS), Julie Danks.

Also in attendance: Cllr Carol Clark.

Apologies: Cllr Nigel Cooke.

CAB 36/22 Welcome and Evacuation Procedure

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

CAB 37/22 Declarations of Interest

For transparency purposes Councillor Norma Stephenson outlined that with regard to agenda item 5 – Armed Forces Covenant – Annual Update for 2021/22 as she formerly served within the armed forces.

Councillor Bob Cook declared a non-registerable interest in respect of agenda item 7 – Minutes of Various Bodies as he was a member of TVCA Cabinet.

For transparency purposes Councillor Bob Cook outlined that with regard to agenda item 8 – Customer Services Excellence his daughter worked for SBC Customer Services.

For transparency purposes Councillor Bob Cook outlined that with regard to agenda item 9 – Customer Services Delivery Update his daughter worked for SBC Customer Services.

CAB 38/22 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2022.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2022 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

CAB 39/22 Armed Forces Covenant – Annual Update for 2021/22

Consideration was given to a report on the Armed Forces Covenant – Annual Update for 2021/22.

The report provided an overview of the Council's fulfilment of its Armed Forces Covenant commitments for the 2021/22 financial year and the current position to date. The report concludes the annual 'cycle' of monitoring these commitments, and set out the focus for the coming year and beyond.

The main focus for activities in 2022/23 would be:

- continuing preparations for the implementation of the due regard Duty, which would include increasing the accuracy of data about the local armed forces community; new training for frontline staff; and monitoring and implementing Duty guidance;
- supporting the implementation of the 2022-24 Action Plan for the 'Strategy for our Veterans' in the borough;
- ensuring that Gold Award status is maintained by continuing to build on the progress of previous years;

Gold Award-holders were re-assessed every 3 years to decide if this status should be retained so the Council's would be due in 2024. This would require the Council to demonstrate that it had continued to stand out as a 'Champion Defence Advocate'. Some of the current and planned activities should help provide this evidence were detailed within the report.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

CAB 40/22 Member Learning & Development Strategy 2023 – 2027 & Induction Programme for Elected Members 2023

Consideration was given to a report on the Member Learning & Development Strategy 2023 – 2027 & Induction Programme for Elected Members 2023.

The Member Learning and Development Strategy outlined the Council's commitment to ensuring members understand their role and how they will be fully equipped with the skills required to carry it out to the highest standard throughout their term of office. In preparation for each local election, the strategy was reviewed taking into consideration best practice across the country and the principals of Charter Status for Elected Member Development.

Officers had subsequently consulted with both the LGA and local authorities within the north-east and it was pleasing to report that the strategy and Member Development programme was considered best practice by the LGA, who continued to signpost other Authorities to this.

An integral part of the strategy was the Induction Programme, which was an important opportunity to provide Councillors with essential information to introduce them to their new role. It enabled Councillors to quickly become familiar with how the Council works, the 'rules' under which a Council operated and the complexities of their role. The Induction Programme also provided an opportunity to set a positive tone, establish clear roles and responsibilities and to build positive working relationships from the outset.

The proposed Member Learning & Development Strategy for 2023-2027 was attached to the report and reflected the Council's ongoing commitment to learning and development. The aims of the Strategy were detailed within the report.

In accordance with previous years, all confirmed electoral candidates would receive a copy of the approved Member Induction programme when their candidacy was declared. This ensured that candidates were aware of the support they would receive upon election and an indication of the diary commitment required for the first few months after election.

On the day of the Count, all Members elected would receive an induction pack containing all necessary documentation to complete as well as key administrative documents including.

A copy of the proposed 2023 Member Induction Programme was attached to the report.

RESOLVED that the Council's Member Learning & Development Strategy 2023-27 and the Induction Programme for Elected Members be approved.

**CAB
41/22** **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:-

TVCA CABINET – 28 October 2022

TSAB – 27 September 2022

RESOLVED that the above minutes be received.

**CAB
42/22** **Customer Service Excellence**

Consideration was given to a report on Customer Service Excellence.

Customer Service Excellence (CSE) was a national quality mark that acknowledged organisations that demonstrated a customer-focused commitment to all that they do. The rigorous assessment process included a review of relevant documents, followed by an on-site inspection to observe practical evidence.

There were 5 criteria that must be satisfied with a number of elements within each. Compliance plus was awarded for elements where exceptional strength was demonstrated.

Assessment followed a 3-year cycle, with a full assessment in year 1 followed by 2 annual reviews to ensure standards were maintained. Stockton Council had been accredited with Customer Service Excellence since 2010 and had demonstrated continuous improvement through every assessment cycle.

The 3-year cycle started again in 2022, with all our previous points of compliance being reset and re-evaluated. Effectively, the bar raises each year as exemplary practice becomes embedded in normal delivery. Staff from a range of Council services provided supporting evidence for the written

submission and hosted visits for the assessors to observe practical examples.

As a result of the assessment the Council achieved full compliance across all 57 aspects of assessment with compliance plus for 14 elements.

**CAB
43/22 Customer Services Delivery
Update**

Consideration was given to a report on the Customer Services Delivery Update.

Customer expectations and behaviours had changed significantly in recent years, accelerated by the pandemic. The way people access the Council and interact with services had continued to evolve, with an increasing number choosing on-line channels. The Council had enabled and encouraged this move as it delivered increased efficiency and allowed the customer to transact with the Council from their own home, at times that suit them. Alongside this improvement of digital channels, Customer Services had continued to provide people with an opportunity for face-to-face support.

The report provided an update on Customer Services provision; how people were interacting with the Council and how Customer Services were ensuring that of residents' needs were met through a dynamic 'right-sizing' approach. This flexible and responsive use of staff and technology had enabled Customer Services to handle more queries in total and more per member of staff.

In 2020/21, each individual member of Customer Service front line staff handled an average of 8577 transactions, compared to 7831 in 2019/20.

However, whilst the long-term trend was toward self-serve and digital interactions, recent events linked to COVID recovery and subsequent 'cost of living' pressures, had significantly increased demand for personalised support and advice. The volume and complexity of this demand had resulted in a significant increase in customer call wait times.

The report outlined work that was underway to recruit and train additional front-line Customer Services staff to tackle this problem.

RESOLVED that the Customer Services channel trends and dynamic delivery model be noted.

**CAB
44/22 Selective Licensing Option
Appraisal**

Consideration was given to a report on the Selective Licensing Option Appraisal.

Previous reports had been presented to Cabinet which considered the option of Selective Licensing of the private rented sector within the borough. During the Selective Licensing consultation period, private sector landlords approached the Council with an alternative proposal, one which they considered would achieve

the same outcomes as Selective Licensing (to drive up standards of property condition and management of private rented housing). Cabinet subsequently agreed to postpone a decision on Selective Licensing to allow for a period of engagement with private sector landlords and the establishment of a Landlord Led Membership scheme. A further report was presented to Cabinet in September 2021 which provided an evaluation of the Landlord Led Membership scheme. Following consideration of this report Cabinet requested that a further evaluation of Selective Licensing be undertaken. The report detailed the process undertaken and identified that following this evaluation there was a robust evidence base to further explore Selective Licensing within 3 areas of the borough (Central Stockton, North Thornaby and Newtown).

To inform any Selective Licensing proposal it was imperative that a Council had a robust evidence base. Therefore, it was not sufficient to simply 'refresh' the evidence the Council had previously considered. Members noted that the process undertaken initially considered each of the boroughs 26 wards. Each ward was considered against 32 measures which could be used to assess whether an area would qualify for one of the 'designations' which can be used to justify Selective Licensing. These designations include:

- (a) Low housing demand
- (b) Anti-social behaviour
- (c) Poor property conditions
- (d) High levels of migration
- (e) High levels of deprivation
- (f) High levels of crime

Examples of the 32 measures considered included: crime data, domestic abuse, criminal damage & arson, theft, Anti-social behaviour, fly tipping, deliberate primary fires and secondary fire data, the number of households claiming universal credit or in fuel poverty, household income under £15k, data relating to the lack of formal qualifications and the number of residents aged 16-18yrs not in employment, education, or training. Other measures considered the tenure profile of wards and the number of vacant dwellings, an attachment to the report details the measures considered.

The above exercise concluded with a 'ranking' of each ward which identified the highest ranked wards as Stockton Town Centre, Mandale & Victoria, Parkfield & Oxbridge, Newtown and Hardwick/Salters Lane. However as Selective Licensing was a tool to address conditions and management of private rented housing, a further exercise was then undertaken which (a) discounted the Hardwick and Salters Lane ward, where private rented housing is not the significant tenure and (b) identified those areas within the remaining wards with significant concentrations of private rented housing stock. In summary, the conclusion of this exercise identified 3 potential areas - Central Stockton, North Thornaby and Newtown.

Cabinet noted that 'red line' plans were not presented for approval at this stage as they would continue to be refined. However, it was anticipated that the proposed 3 areas would include a significant number of private rented properties. For example, current tenure profiling suggests in the Central Stockton area 47% of properties were privately rented, this was 44% in North Thornaby and 61% in Newtown.

Before Selective Licensing could proceed it was necessary to 'work up' a detailed proposal which must include:

- (a) The business case (Scheme Proposal) for each of the proposed Selective Licensing scheme designation areas, detailing their individual supporting evidence bases.
- (b) A detailed designation map (red line map, with a supporting street listing detail) for each of the proposed Selective Licensing scheme designation areas.
- (c) A fee structure proposal (the cost to landlords for each property licence).

Cabinet noted that contact had been made with local authorities who had active Selective Licensing schemes to determine best practice and understand scheme fee structures. Clearly the licence fee would be a key consideration for private landlords and whilst a proposed licence fee would be worked up (and evidenced) it was expected to be lower than that proposed back in 2018.

- (d) A formal consultation plan (including consultation material).
- (e) The mandatory and discretionary licence conditions which the Council is proposing to adopt.
- (f) Details of any Selective Licensing exemptions.

Subject to Cabinet decision to approve the proposal to explore Selective Licensing in 3 potential areas of the borough (Central Stockton, North Thornaby and Newtown) the above information would be prepared, and a further report be presented back Cabinet for further consideration. As noted in the indicative timeline below it was anticipated this would be summer 2023, on the assumption that Cabinet grant approval to move to formal consultation an indicative timeline leading to formal scheme implementation was detailed within the report. Members noted that this timeline would be refined as the proposal progresses to ensure it complied with statutory guidance.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The proposal to explore Selective Licensing in 3 areas of the borough (Central Stockton, North Thornaby and Newtown) be approved.
2. A further report be presented back to Cabinet (anticipated summer 2023). This report will include the detail of the areas proposed for the Selective Licensing designations ('red line' maps), the detailed rationale for each proposal, the proposed fee structure, and a public consultation programme.
3. A further report be presented back to Cabinet following the conclusion of the Selective Licensing public consultation exercise (an indicative timeline for next steps is detailed in paragraph 10 of the report).

Consideration was given to a report on Inclusive Growth.

The report provided an overview of relevant key announcements as they related to the economy and the Inclusive Growth Strategy 2022-27.

Members received an update report on Inclusive Growth at its meeting in November 2021. This report followed on from that and would be produced on a periodic basis going forward.

The detail contained in the report had been framed around the four aims contained in the Inclusive Growth Strategy 2022-27 along with any pertinent strategic updates.

The report covered the following key areas:-

- Strategic updates
- Support businesses to survive and grow
- New businesses and investment are being attracted to the Borough creating new jobs
- All residents have access to training linked to skills gaps and job opportunities
- Deliver interventions that facilitate inclusive growth

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

**CAB
46/22**

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2022

Consideration was given to a report on the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2022.

The report set out proposed changes for polling districts and places taking into account the submission of the Acting Returning Officer and feedback from consultation.

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) identified Stockton-on-Tees as requiring an electoral review given the length of time since the last review was carried out.

The final recommendations confirm a Council size of 56 Councillors (the same number as there are now), 27 wards (one more than there are now) and changes to the boundaries of 23 wards with four remaining the same. In addition, as a result of the proposed new ward boundaries, revised parish electoral arrangements had been agreed for Billingham Town Council, Egglecliffe, Grindon and Thorpe Thewles, Ingleby Barwick, Kirklevington and Castlelevington and Thornaby.

An Order had been laid in Parliament and the new electoral arrangements will come into force at the local elections in May 2023.

As a result of changes to wards and boundaries, it had been necessary to conduct an interim polling district review.

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a requirement to conduct reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places every five years. Although not a compulsory review, the same processes should be undertaken for an interim review. The next compulsory review must be started and completed between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.

A Council's area is divided into polling districts with one or more districts making up a ward, with a polling place being the area or building within a polling district in which a polling station is situated.

Polling districts needed to be revised to ensure that they are co-terminus with the new ward boundaries. In addition, the review has also considered:

- Polling Districts - Are they well defined? Do they follow natural boundaries? Are there suitable transport links? Are there any obstacles to crossing polling district boundaries?
- Polling Places – The location, size and accessibility of the polling place and its availability now and in the future
- Polling Stations – The suitability and accessibility of the room or area for use as a polling station. A polling station is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. Unlike polling districts and polling places which are fixed by the Local Authority, polling stations are chosen by the relevant Returning Officer for the election

Electoral Commission Guidance was detailed within the report. In short, polling districts had needed to be re-drawn to reflect the needs of both existing and future ward boundaries. This would be achieved by establishing temporary polling districts for the period 1 December 2022 to 1 December 2023 which would then be merged into appropriate adjoining polling districts on publication of the Revised Register on 1 December 2023. The interim polling district review had therefore consulted on temporary and longer-term changes.

The Acting Returning Officer's submission was published on 21 September 2022 with a closing date for comments of 28 October 2022. The submission summarised the existing arrangements, proposals for temporary polling districts for the period 1 December 2022 to 1 December 2023 and proposals for how these temporary districts would then be merged into appropriate adjoining polling districts on publication of the Revised Register on 1 December 2023.

The Statutory Notice publicising the review was displayed / sent to:

- Libraries
- Website
- Parish Councils
- Community Centres

In addition, the Acting Returning Officer's submission was sent to:

- Website
- Libraries
- All Councillors
- MPs
- Parish Councils

- Area Partnerships
- Disability Groups/ BME/faith community via Catalyst

A table within the report contained a summary of the comments received and comments/revised proposals in response to the consultation feedback.

Final proposals of the Acting Returning Officer, following consultation, were attached to the report.

RECOMMENDED to Council that the changes to Polling Districts and Polling Places be approved.

**CAB
47/22 Private Hire & Hackney Carriage
Licensing Policy Review**

Consideration was given to a report on the Private Hire & Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy Review.

Cabinet considered the views and comments received from the Licensing Committee, transport trade and other interested parties following consultation on the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy.

The private hire & hackney carriage licensing policy was approved in 2021 to adopt the Department for Transport published the 'Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards'.

It was vital to review policies to reflect changes in the industry both nationally and locally. The effectiveness of the hackney carriage and private hire licensing regime depends on licensing authorities to acknowledge and manage changes to ensure that, alongside the benefits being achieved, any negatives were minimised for passengers, the trade, and wider communities.

The licensed trade made a number of requests to amend the current policy and a 21-day public consultation was undertaken giving stakeholders opportunity to comment.

The public consultation survey was available online and links were directly sent to all licensees via the Trade Times. The link was also emailed to private hire operators and Stockton Hackney Carriage Drivers Association (SHCDA).

Members, other local authorities and responsible authorities including the police were sent the link and given an opportunity to comment on the proposed changes.

Details of the policy review and how to make comments was also advertised to the public on the Council website and library notice boards.

The consultation closed, with 78 responses with majority agreement on the proposed changes. A summary of the consultation document was attached to the report.

In response to the consultation two further amendments to the new wording had

been proposed on:

- Wheelchair accessible vehicle renewals detailed and highlighted at page 3 of the attachment to the report.
- LPG vehicles detailed and highlighted at page 4 of the attachment to the report.

The full consultation result report was attached to the report.

A background report giving further information on the proposals and reasons for the changes was attached to the report.

The Licensing Committee considered the draft policy and consultation document on 8 November 2022 and no further comments were made and recommendations agreed.

With regard to the next steps, a summary of the consultation and any further Cabinet Member comments would be considered by full Council on 23 November 2022. If approved it was proposed the revised policy would be implemented on 1 December 2022.

If revised, the trade would be informed of the new policy via email and via private hire operators and the SHCDA. Changes would also be publicised on the trade Facebook page and via the Council website. In addition the policy changes will be added to future trade meeting agendas.

RECOMMENDED to Council that:-

- 1. The content of the report be noted.**
- 2. The proposed Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy be approved with an implementation date of 1 December 2022.**