

Council

A meeting of Council was held on Wednesday, 16th September, 2015.

Present: The Worshipful the Mayor (Cllr Ian Dalgarno); Cllr Helen Atkinson, Cllr Sonia Bailey, Cllr Paul Baker, Cllr Chris Barlow, Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Julia Cherrett, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Michael Clark, Cllr Chris Clough, Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Gillian Corr, Cllr Evaline Cunningham, Cllr Philip Dennis, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Di Hewitt, Cllr Ben Houchen, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Mohammed Javed, Cllr Paul Kirton, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Mrs Kathryn Nelson, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell, Cllr Maurice Perry, Cllr Lauriane Povey, Cllr Rachael Proud, Cllr David Rose, Cllr Paul Rowling, Cllr Andrew Stephenson, Cllr Norma Stephenson O.B.E, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Tracey Stott, Cllr Laura Tunney, Cllr Matthew Vickers, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Sally Ann Watson, Cllr David Wilburn, Cllr Norma Wilburn and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

Officers: N Schneider (CE); J Danks, B Brown, L King (R), J Humphreys (CESC); P Dobson (DNS); P Kelly (PH); D E Bond, P K Bell, J McDonald (LD).

Also in attendance: Members of the public.

Apologies: Cllr Derrick Brown, Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Lisa Grainge, Cllr David Harrington, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Stephen Parry, Cllr Ross Paterson, Cllr Mike Smith, Cllr Julia Whitehill and Cllr Bill Woodhead.

C 39/15 Welcome, Evacuation Procedure and the Recording of the Meeting

The Worshipful the Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the procedure for the recording of the meeting.

The evacuation procedure was also noted.

C 40/15 Former Councillor David Coleman

Members stood in a minute's silence as a mark of respect for former Councillor David Coleman.

C 41/15 Declarations of Interest

Councillors Atkinson, Hall, Mrs McCoy, Mrs O'Donnell and Stoker declared person prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 11 -Community Governance Reviews - Billingham Town Council and Elton Parish Council as they were members of Billingham Town Council. Councillors Atkinson, Hall, Mrs McCoy, Mrs O'Donnell and Stoker withdrew from the meeting and left the room during consideration of the item.

Councillor Hall declared person non prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 11 -Community Governance Reviews - Billingham Town Council and Elton Parish Council as she was an elector for Elton Parish.

C 42/15 Minutes

The minutes of the ordinary meeting and the special meeting held on 22nd July 2015 were signed by the Worshipful the Mayor as a correct record subject to the following correction:-

At the ordinary meeting held on 22nd July 2015 at minute C 29/15 Councillor Evaline Cunningham declared a personal prejudicial interest and not a personal

non prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 8 - ECO External Wall Insulation Scheme Update as her son worked for Go Warm.

**C
43/15** **Presentation Economic Growth & Development Services Awards 2015**

The Worshipful the Mayor and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Transport presented the following awards to Officers within the Council's Economic Growth and Development Services:-

Client of the year 2015 award as part of the Constructing Excellence north east awards. This award was in recognition of the Council's approach to construction contracts and was seen as an exemplar in the construction industry. The Council was nominated by Balfour Beatty for this award

Stockton Council was also winners of the 2015 Robert Stephenson award for the civil engineering works carried out in replacing the existing footbridge at Thornaby Railway Station, which was 125 years old and beyond its design life, with a new steel bridge structure. The award recognised the collaborative working between all parties and the complexities of working next to and over a live and very busy railway track.

The 2015 Robert Stephenson awards had also presented the Council with a commendation for the sustainability and environmental public realm works carried out in Yarm High Street. This work sought to improve accessibility across the High Street and to enhance the setting of the listed Town Hall. The design included the use of sensitive materials in respect of the conservation area setting and was delivered in consultation with local disability groups.

**C
44/15** **Public Question Time**

The following question had been submitted by Eileen Wiles for response by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People:-

"Can I please ask the Council how many children are currently in residential care outside the borough?"

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People responded with:-

"25."

Eileen Wiles asked the following supplementary question:-

"How many of these children are in a position to return back to this area?"

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People responded with:-

"At any one time there are different children in different circumstances in the area and outside the area. There are always children that require specialist treatment so at any one time you can't have a definite number. I can tell you since 2013 that the number has reduced from 32 to 25 so that gives you an idea of how we are trying to bring back our children."

The following question had been submitted by Miss Steiner for response by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People:-

“Has Mr Zak McIlhargey or anyone associated with Spark of Genius NE LLP either approached or are planning to approach other local authorities with a view to selling the beds in their children's homes that are based in the Stockton borough?”

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People responded with:-

"The Council is not aware that Mr Zak McIlhargey or any other person associated with Spark of Genius has or is planning to approach other Local Authorities with a view to selling placements. Certainly SBC is not at this time contemplating selling any placements to any other Local Authorities.

Currently there are vacancies at Red Plains, but a decision has been taken that is fully supported by Spark of Genius that we will not fill any places until we are sure the improvements have been sustained and are embedded.

As stated previously this Joint Venture was established in order to enable the Local Authority to bring back into the borough children looked after currently placed outside of the Local Authority area.

I would however remind Miss Steiner and others that in the Cabinet report on 7 March 2013 there was reference that we could look at vacant places to offer to other local authorities, but I have to emphasize that this would only be done in consultation with the Director.

As far as we are aware there are no plans and nobody has approached anybody and there is no intention to do so at this time. Those places would only be sold however if it was felt by the Home's Manager that any young person that was not a Stockton looked after child would be appropriately matched with the other young people in the home.

In addition the Corporate Director would also be consulted about any placement, as any placing Local Authority has a duty to consult with the Corporate Director in the area that they are placing. I have also asked that the Corporate Director ensures I am made aware when any children or young people are placed in the Joint Venture Homes that are not the responsibility of this Local Authority."

Miss Steiner asked the following supplementary question:-

"If there were any surplus places because there wasn't enough children to come back to this area bearing in mind you have to have three and a half children to break even would you consider selling surplus places?"

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People responded with:-

"As I have said it was in the Cabinet report to do that, but our aim is to bring our children back home. We would only do that if the circumstances arose. That is not contemplated at the moment, because as I will say in the response to the following question we haven't looked at a forth home yet and I will repeat we

haven't opened a third one. I won't lie, we would look at that if the circumstances arose, but I have to emphasize that the only thing we would not do is put a price on a child's future."

The following question had been submitted by Peter Goring for response by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People:-

"What measures are the Council taking to keep the residents of Hartburn safe after the latest police figures made available under the FOI with relation to Red Plains?"

Also what happened to promise of responsible parking at Red Plains? On Thursday 3rd September there were several cars once again blocking the road outside the property."

Peter Goring was not in attendance at the meeting and had requested a written response.

The Worshipful the Mayor indicated that Mr Goring would be provided with a written response.

The following question had been submitted by Mr E McDonald for response by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People:-

"Have Stockton Borough Council and/or Spark of Genius identified the fourth property yet?"

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People responded with:-

"No we haven't identified a fourth property."

Mr E McDonald asked the following supplementary question:-

"Can you tell me why Spark of Genius are advertising for staff for the next property?"

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People responded with:-

"My understanding is that the advert referred to the staffing of King Edward School not a fourth property."

The following question had been submitted by Kenneth Jones for response by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People. Kenneth Jones was not in attendance at the meeting and had requested that his question be read out:-

"Despite assurances that Red Plains, 118 Darlington Road, would be well managed, please comment on the outcome of the most recent Ofsted Report. For the purposes of reference the report states that it requires improvement in all areas?"

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People responded with:-

"Whilst I do acknowledge the recent Ofsted report made a Judgement of Requiring Improvement, the report also said "There are no serious or widespread failures that result in their (the children's) welfare not being safeguarded or promoted".

At the time of the inspection referred to in this question, the home's interim manager had been in post only 4 weeks. Despite this, the report pointed out one of the homes strengths, was that a recovery and improvement plan had already been put in place and the management team had recognised the areas of improvement and had started to implement changes. The Interim Manager has now been confirmed by Ofsted as the Permanent Manager for the home and that is Ofsted's judgement.

I personally met with Zak McIlhargey the Managing Director for SPARK on the 13th August 2015 and at this meeting he acknowledged that this newly opened home had not been running as well as we all would hope. He was confident that the improvement plan in place would make a difference. He gave me a copy of the plan and I feel confident it can be implemented. There have been no indicators brought to my attention that would suggest this is not the case.

I am aware of the Improvement Plan and the actions being put in place to address the areas highlighted by Ofsted.

There is a system in place whereby complaints can be made direct to Ofsted who can contact the Local Authorities directly should there be any safeguarding concerns. This has not been the case in regard to Red Plains despite a number of complaints from the public. The manager and Service Manager from Red Plains have met with an Ofsted inspector since the inspection and discussed in detail the action plan and progress of the home. There were no indicators from that meeting brought to my attention that would suggest the home was not making the changes needed as highlighted in the report.

SBC have had assurances from SPARK that the secondment of one of our own experienced Residential Managers to the post of Service Manager with SPARK has had a positive effect. Already the home is reported to be more settled, routines are in place for the children and many of the tried and tested ways of working in our homes have been implemented into Red Plains."

The following question had been submitted by Edward Jones for response by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People. Edward Jones was not in attendance at the meeting and had requested that his question be read out:-

"Would you please comment on the police statistics for Red Plains, 118 Darlington Road. For the purposes of reference, from March to May, Red Plains has made 62 calls to the police and visited the property 49 times?"

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People responded with:-

"The police statistics between March and May related mainly to 2 young people who no longer reside at the home.

The police were called to the home as a result of the home following the guidelines to ensure children and young people are safe. The vast majority of the calls to the police were in line with these strict protocols for safeguarding vulnerable young people living in the home.

It is worth noting that in the Ofsted report of 09/06/2015, the Inspectors stated that:

"When young people go missing, there is a clear process including staff going looking for the young people and involving the appropriate local organisations. On their return young people are involved in a meeting to try establish why they have gone missing and if anything could have stopped them doing so" – this was considered a strength in the report.

The home continues to work with the young people to reduce the level of reporting.

I am aware that the calls to the police have reduced more recently and I am aware that some of the calls were not from the home.

Over the last couple of years local authorities that have not consistently and appropriately informed the police and local authorities when a young person goes missing and the definition of that is depending on what their care plan is. It can be anything from 20 minutes to an hour. I think we should take comfort from the fact that the staff in Red Plains have followed the guidelines and informed the police. The police themselves are required to attend. I'm confident the staff are acting appropriately within the guidelines to keep our children safe."

The following question had been submitted by Gareth Rees for response by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People. Gareth Rees was not in attendance at the meeting and had requested that his question be read out:-

"As a result of the staff turnover at Fairview, Durham Road, Thorpe Thewles TS21 3JN is it a safe and stable environment in which these children can develop? and

Can Councillor McCoy identify the reasons for her answer?"

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People responded with:-

"Whilst it's acknowledged a high staff turnover in a residential setting has the potential to be unsettling, there is no reason to believe this to be the case at Fairview or that this home is not a safe environment in which children can develop.

Fairview Home has been judged by Ofsted to be Good.

The most recent report in March 2015 stated:

"The Registered Manager and the staff team are ambitious for young people to

succeed and provide consistent personalised care with effective boundaries.”

The report also refers to a “nurturing staff team”.

I am also aware that at a recent unannounced monitoring visit undertaken last week by an SBC member of staff, 3 of the young people were seen and they all reported they felt safe.

The young people appeared relaxed and the environment was settled and the children appeared happy with their placement.

The young people are also seen regularly by their social worker, independent review officer and other professionals.

During these visits children are seen alone, which is extremely important, and social workers and IROs check on the children’s welfare and monitor they are being safeguarded.

The children also have the opportunity to talk to the Independent Person who monitors the care provided on a monthly basis and provides a written report to Ofsted.

The local Ward Councillor also has the opportunity to link with the Home, and to visit the Home regularly. To date this offer has not been taken up.

The answers I have read out I have read out with my lead member head on to ensure that you have the truth and facts, but as a corporate parent I'm saddened that any MP would go to the press with inaccurate information that undermines the care, protection and hopes that we have for the children who through no fault of their own are in our care.

I don't know what message that sends to our children and young people who we are trying to help to see what it is like to live in a family environment in the community. It is something a lot of the children have not experienced. We are trying to give them that so they can have a better future. This is what these young people need and deserve. They need out understanding and encouragement all of which we would wish for our own children and grandchildren."

The following question had been submitted by Jill Coulter for response by the Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety. Jill Coulter was not in attendance at the meeting and had requested that her question be read out:-

“In light of the most recent police statistics for 118 Darlington road (Red Plains) involving incidences such as criminal damage, anti-social behaviour, hoax calls and violent crime. Please can you confirm if the property is in breach of any of the following laws as highlighted in the document ‘Neighbour nuisance and anti-social behaviour’ compiled by The Local Government Ombudsmen:

a. Section 1 Crime and Disorder Act 1998 – Anti-social Behaviour Order (ASBO)

- b. Possession proceedings under Housing Act 1996 – breach of tenancy agreement and under ground 2, schedule 2 Housing Act 1985 – nuisance
- c. Section 152(1) Housing Act 1996
- d. Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- e. Sections 79 and 80 Environmental Protection Act 1990
- f. Noise Act 1996
- g. Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 (ASBA)
- h. Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA)”

The Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety responded with:-

"Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Ms Coulter for your question. I'd also like to thank you for the concern you have for the safety and wellbeing of the children in the home. I am therefore happy to reassure you that the home is not in breach of any of the legislation you list in your question."

The following question had been submitted by Colin Rodgers for response by the Leader of the Council:-

"Could the council please confirm that "Spark of Genius" (SoG) has been sold for a sum in excess of £9m (single shareholder) and if so how will this affect the rolling 5yr contract between themselves and SoG? Are they also happy that there are no trust issues when things are now so fundamentally different from when agreements were made and assurances were given?"

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

"Spark of Genius is a company in its own right and it is not for me to confirm, or otherwise, the value of the sale price of the company. I should, however, point out that it is common practice in the private sector for takeovers and merges to take place. The sale of the shareholding in Spark of Genius will not affect the operation of the Joint Venture."

Colin Rodgers asked the following supplementary question:-

"So the 5 year contract will not be affected?"

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

"No"

The following question had been submitted by Barbara Dobson for response by the Leader of the Council. Barbara Dobson was not in attendance at the meeting and had asked that her question be read out:-

"In the financial year 2014/2015, what has been the total cost SBC have paid for looked after children (this should include children in foster care and residential care)?"

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

"The number of Looked After Children has increased from 235 in 2010 to 370 now and in the same period our costs have increased massively from £6.8m to just under £15m in 2014/15. This increase coincides with the huge reductions in Government funding of £52m over the same period of time and demonstrates that this Government are not reflecting the importance of supporting our vulnerable young people in the Council funding settlement."

C Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Update

45/15

Consideration was given to a report that provided an update of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and proposed the Big Picture programme to be delivered over the next 3 years to address the financial pressures facing the Council.

The Council had seen a significant reduction in Level of Government funding in recent years. Between 2010/11 and 2015/16, there had been a reduction of £52m which was a 42% cash reduction or 59% when inflation was taken into account. This meant that the Council's budget overall had reduced by 30% and as a consequence staffing numbers had reduced by approximately 700.

Councils had not been notified of the funding allocations for 2016/17 and future years. There had been various announcements confirming public sector funding reductions but the impact on Local Government specifically had not been identified. Despite there being a budget in July, further detail of funding was unlikely until the autumn. Every indication was that funding reductions would continue and the current Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) assumed reductions of 9% in each of the next 3 years. This equated to an additional £15m reduction. It was possible however, that reductions would be higher than this or would be more front loaded, placing an additional pressure on the MTFP.

The Government announced a series of in year budget funding reductions in June. Although core Local Government funding was not reduced, the public health grant was reduced, in year by £200m nationally. Consultation was underway on how this would be implemented and it was estimated that the funding allocated to Stockton would reduce by approximately £1m. This could be accommodated through contingency and underspends in this year but it was possible that this reduction would continue into future years.

Opportunities to invest to save would continue to be sought. One such opportunity was to support Tees Active Limited to purchase and install a Hangfast system at Billingham Forum. The system was a climbing wall and evidence suggests that accessible climbing facilities were proving financially viable and popular across the UK. Tees Active Limited sought £300,000 one-off investment and expect to generate £100,000 saving from the annual Management fee charged to the Council from 2016/17 as a result. This provided an investment to save opportunity to be funded by the Transformation Reserve and was recommended for approval.

The MTFP approved by Council in February 2015 outlined the budget position for 2016/17 to 2018/19 and a table detailed this within the report.

The table demonstrated the core gap and the Growth pressure within the Big

Ticket Areas and associated target savings. The report in February also made available £6.1 million in reserves to support the budget gap and allow time for savings to be delivered.

The MTFP had been updated, in particular to reflect changing circumstances and the position surrounding Business Rates. Members were aware from previous reports of the complex nature of the Business Rates Retention Scheme and the added uncertainty this causes to medium term financial planning.

The plan had also been updated to assume that the public health funding reduction of approx. £1m per year would continue into future years.

The Big Ticket position had also been incorporated into the plan. Members were aware from the report in February of the challenges around the Children's Big Ticket area. These challenges continued and whilst some work was ongoing, the appointment to the Head of Planning, Partnerships and Early Help, post would ensure progress was made in exploring opportunities to reduce pressures further. The MTFP and target saving in this area reflected the numbers of looked after children and the time it would take to start effecting changes to reduce spend.

Following implementation of the Better Care Fund and the development of proposals for integrated working, a number of social care services had been re-designated to form a multi-disciplinary team and this was reflected in the updated MTFP.

The updated Medium Term Financial Plan and the position incorporating the Big Ticket savings targets were detailed within the report.

Cabinet and Council had always been clear that there would need to be further budget reductions. Unfortunately, the impact of Business Rate appeals meant that the savings needed to be delivered earlier and to tighter timescales than had previously been anticipated. Even utilising the £6.1m reserve there was an expected gap of £3.6m in 2016/17.

Despite the levels of funding reductions, the Council had continued to deliver high quality services to all parts of the Borough across a wide range of areas and had tried to protect front line services. Given the continued funding reductions however this was becoming harder and harder and a significant programme needed to be developed across the organisation to address the budget gap. This would be the Big Picture programme.

The proposed approach by Cabinet to addressing the budget gap was two-fold. Firstly, there were a series of specific proposals which Cabinet would recommend be implemented. These were shown in detail as attached to the report. Whilst the reductions would clearly have an impact, they were mainly back office or savings where there was minimal impact on front line service delivery. These would deliver £3.5m by 2018/19. These included:-

- A review of senior management to reflect different ways of working across the organisation and its inevitable 'shrinkage'.

- Proposed further reduction in processing, organisational support and administration.
- Proposed reviews in a number of areas further utilising technology to improve service efficiency.
- Budget savings and income generated which would have minimal impact on front line services.

The Council had for many years continued to develop services and look at ways of delivering efficiencies. An attachment to the report detailed areas where it was proposed to explore opportunities for using technology and process review methodologies to deliver service transformation and further efficiencies. Savings were estimated and whilst Cabinet were recommending that these reviews were undertaken, details of the actual savings delivered would be reported back to Cabinet at a future date. The Council had for many years applied process review methodologies. Building on this strength, the Council would explore opportunities to work with experienced private and public sector partners in a peer challenge – type initiative to support the delivery of this aspect of the programme. These reviews were expected to deliver £2m by 2018/19.

Given the level of savings required, the Council couldn't continue to provide all of the services at the same level, in the same way and to the same standards. Even with the savings and efficiencies outlined, there was an estimated gap of approximately £6.9m and this would require changes in the level of front line services. It was inevitable that the Council would need to provide a differential level of service with fewer universal services and more services targeted to areas of most need. In some areas there would be a reduction in service standards.

The details of the front line services which would be subject to a detailed review were attached to the report. These reviews would include appropriate consultation and impact assessments and would be reported back to Cabinet prior to implementation. Youth services, Children Centres and waste / refuse collection would be wide-ranging and would be reported in to/undertaken by Scrutiny Committees. Overall they would aim to deliver the £6.9m required to balance the budget and they would need to consider:-

- Statutory responsibilities
- The service specifications, levels and standards
- Targeting the services to the areas or people in most need
- The requirement for differential service levels (e.g. this principle has already been agreed by Cabinet for the library service)

The updated Medium Term Financial Plan, incorporating these changes and savings proposals was detailed within the report.

Clearly given the budget position and level of savings required, there needed to be an extremely cautious approach to any new commitments.

Work on delivering these savings proposals would be supported by a communications campaign called "The Big Picture" campaign through which information would be provided about how the Council spends money in the

borough as well as updates about the financial position and how the Council were responding to the huge challenge of tackling a £17 million shortfall in the budget by 2018/19. The campaign would include information about the services provided and the challenges that were being faced to meet the many competing demands. It would be a highly visible campaign, featuring prominently in Stockton News, on the Council website, in public buildings and on Council vehicles. The information would also be provided to all Members and staff to assist them in their communication with residents. The aim was to help partners and residents to understand that:-

- The Council provided a huge range of services and many of those that cost a lot of money (such as social care) were not visible to many people in the borough.
- The Council still has big ambitions and wanted to make sure Stockton-on-Tees remains a thriving borough for everyone.
- Over the next few years the Council would face the biggest financial challenge yet – to reduce the budget by £17 million by 2018. There would be some really tough decisions to make, there were many demands on the budget and the Council wouldn't be able to meet them all. This was at a time when demands for many of the services were increasing.
- The Council had a strong track record of sound financial management and would continue to tackle this challenge in a planned, orderly and careful way. The Council would continue to deliver genuine value for money, to be innovative, to change the way it worked and to rethink the way services were delivered to make the Council even more efficient and most importantly,
- The Council would continue to put residents at the heart of everything it did and to make sure that the money it had made the biggest difference to the people that needed it the most.

There was a significant workload involved in delivering the programme outlined in the report. There was also a significant work programme around the Big Ticket areas and a number of high profile, complex and large scale regeneration projects such as, development of the Combined Authority, leisure facility in Ingleby Barwick, major housing initiatives such as the Victoria Scheme, etc. which needed to be delivered in the same timescales.

Many of the reviews were large scale and complex and would result in new ways of working and as well as identifying capacity in the organisation, leadership and drive would be critical to ensuring the programme was delivered. This was a three to four year service and organisational redesign programme. This would also include fundamentally different ways of working and it was inevitable that the organisation would be smaller. It was difficult to predict exact numbers at this stage but there could be a reduction in employees of the order of 300-400 and the Council would look very different following these changes. The Council would continue to operate the effective management of change and consultation policies and to engender constructive relations with the Trade Unions.

It was also important that the Council continued to deliver services whilst these

changes were taking place.

The Council had previously recognised that dedicated capacity did result in enabling change to be implemented and the approach to the Adult Big Ticket programme was an example of this approach.

Cabinet agreed the Shaping the Brighter Future Programme to recognise the need to develop the organisation in advance of these challenges and this was progressing well. Many of the principles of the programme could be used to support the agenda moving forward.

The savings proposals included a saving of £750,000 associated with Senior Management of the organisation to reflect the changes planned future size and state of the Council.

Cabinet at their meeting held on 16th July 2015 RESOLVED that:-

1. Members allowance will be frozen for another year.
2. £300,000 be approved from the Transformation Reserve to fund the investment to save opportunity with Tees Active Limited.
3. Changes in Senior Management be agreed in principle and a further report be received outlining the proposals in September 2015.

Council RESOLVED that:-

4. The level of funding reductions be noted and the savings identified at Appendix A be approved.
5. The reviews of Services outlined at Appendix B be undertaken.
6. The concerns about the operation of the Business Rate Retention Scheme be noted and the Council continues to press for a fairer, more appropriate funding regime.

C 46/15 Planning for the Future – Managing Transition

Consideration was given to a report on a managed transition toward a new senior management structure for the Council.

A report was presented to Cabinet on 16 July 2015 which updated Members on the Council's financial position and this was summarised within the report.

The July report outlined a planned approach to deliver the required savings over the next MTFP period. The approach, which built on the planned approach adopted to date, combined a number of specific proposals, transformation and efficiency reviews, utilisation of new technology and detailed service reviews which would be reported to Cabinet.

There was a recognition in the July report that there would need to be a review of the organisational and senior management structure to release capacity to drive the transformational change necessary to meet the savings challenge.

This proposed structural change would not only deliver annual savings of £800,000 but was vital to retain capacity to deliver the scale of change required over the next 3 years. The report set out a proposed approach to the senior management changes.

A twin tracked approach to organisational development was proposed. A managed transition towards a new senior managerial structure which more accurately reflected the future needs of the Council would be implemented between September 2015 and April 2018 and a temporary transformation and change team would be established immediately to drive change and development over the same period to ensure that the organisation was in the right place to operate fully under the new structure by 2018.

The proposed permanent establishment structure and Director responsibilities were attached to the report. The new structure deleted the Corporate Director tier and would reduce the Senior Management Structure further from 31 posts in 2008 and the current level of 22 posts, to 16 posts.

Implementation of the new structure would be phased over the next few years, and it was expected that this would be fully operational by April 2018. However employee and union consultation on the new structure would happen as soon as is possible following Cabinet and Council approval. Appointments would be made to the new positions immediately following the consultation in order to avoid uncertainty for staff across the organisation and to free capacity for the transformation team. However the timing of transfer to new posts would be determined by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader / Deputy Leader taking into account such issues as progress of review implementation and also external changes such as the speed of health integration. An indicative view of the leave dates of the seven departing senior managers and directors was provided, however these timings might be subject to change as operational needs dictated and as the work in the transformation team progressed:

Corporate Director CESC – August 2017

Corporate Director DNS – March 2018

Director Law & Democracy – June 2017 (following PCC elections, possible Euro referendum and 'Metro Mayor')

Head of Customer Services and Taxation – March 2017

Head of Policy, Improvement and Engagement – March 2018

Head of Adult Operations – August 2017 (formalising end of EIT temporary arrangements)

Head of Housing and Community Protection – July 2017

In addition to the need to transform the on-going permanent structure of the organisation there was also a need to meet the huge immediate demand on capacity (experience and knowledge) to deliver the agreed savings programme, the ambitious regeneration programme and the Combined Authority and devolution changes. The proposal was to build on previous approaches and to create a dedicated full time transformation and change team. One of the main lessons learned from the Big Ticket reviews was that the allocation of senior management resource and capacity facilitates the delivery of change and savings.

In the interim it was felt essential to establish a small dedicated temporary team of experienced, qualified officers to drive these challenges forward to deliver savings, change and major projects. Utilising the skills, experience and knowledge of the people who would be leaving the organisation over the next three years would allow the Council to manage an orderly transition to the new permanent structure and free up capacity to deliver major change using people who understood the organisation and were more able to bring about change than external consultants. The in-house approach was also more cost efficient.

It was proposed that the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive would oversee the delivery of the programme and ensure that the transition team linked effectively with the proposed permanent organisation.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The principles and proposals of the new substantive senior management structure, revisions to the Chief Officer pay and grading structure and the exit arrangements for members of the senior management team as outlined in the report be agreed.
2. Delegation be given to the Chief Executive, in consultation with Leader / Deputy Leader of the Council, regarding implementation and any final amendments following formal employee and union consultation.
3. It be noted that the new structure will be subject to ongoing monitoring and review alongside MTFP & Council Plan reviews.
4. The establishment of a temporary transformation and change team as outlined in the report be agreed.
5. It be noted that the proposed budget saving of £800,000 was to be built into the MTFP with temporary transitional arrangements to be funded from the transformation reserve.

**C
47/15** **Review of 2015 May Elections and an Update on 2015 Canvass;
Community Governance Reviews; the Police and Crime Commissioner
Elections and Parliamentary Boundary Review**

Consideration was given to a report on the Review of 2015 May Elections and an update on 2015 Canvass, Community Governance Reviews, Police and Crime Commissioner Elections and Parliamentary Boundary Review.

The Parliamentary, District and Parish elections had been held on 7 May 2015. The report highlighted what went well, what could be done better and the next steps needed to allow SBC to undertake a successful PCC election programme in 2016.

The combined nature of the election programme in 2015 had created inevitable pressures within key areas of the project. This was the first time since 1979 that the Parliamentary, Borough and Parish Elections had taken place at the same time resulting in 33 separate polls to administer; this was also the first time that an election had been delivered under the new Individual Electoral Registration (IER) regime. As a result the workload for the elections increased significantly.

By way of illustrating the scale of the task:-

- 339 nomination papers were checked (most of which required further follow up and multiple checks)
- 2,254 assenter details had to be checked against the electoral register
- 196 agents were appointed
- 100 polling stations were booked
- 505 staff were appointed to 1,372 jobs
- 70,002 postal ballot packs were issued and 64,162 were receipted and opened representing an unprecedented turnout of postal voters
- A staggering 2,592 postal votes were returned on polling day which all had to be opened and processed for verification as soon as possible after 10pm

The interest in the election also resulted in a surge of registration and postal vote applications which put additional pressures on the Electoral Team working to new IER processes and at a time when work on administering the elections was gathering pace. During the statutory elections period:-

- 16,127 registration applications were received
- 2,140 postal vote applications were received

The report highlighted the regional, sub regional and local feedback and the related recommendations / conclusions.

The 2015 canvass would be the first full canvass of all properties in the Borough since the move to Individual Electoral Registration. The canvass would differ from other previous canvasses under the old system because the form sent to properties, the "Household Enquiry Form (HEF)", was used purely to elicit information about who lived in the property and would not be used to register them. Following receipt of a Household Enquiry Form, any new resident who had moved into a particular property would need to be sent an invitation to register individually and this could be completed on the Invitation to Register form provided, online, or over the telephone (provided that national insurance number and date of birth are provided).

The 2015 Canvass would also be last that was undertaken before the transition to individual electoral registration was completed. Any existing elector that had not registered individually by 1 December 2015 would be removed from the register. A large number of existing electors had been transferred automatically to the IER register last summer following matching against central government records and those unconfirmed or "red" electors, who could not be confirmed automatically, had already received repeated communications from electoral services and personal visits. These "red" electors, along with any new elector, needed to provide national insurance number and date of birth to complete their registration.

Key dates in the 2015 Canvass were detailed within the report.

Invitations to register individually would be sent out to anyone added to the HEF form throughout all stages of the canvass.

A comprehensive engagement plan had been developed identifying a range of activities to raise awareness of the canvass across the Borough. This would

include press releases, social media messages on Twitter and Facebook, Stockton News, KYIT, advertising on 180,000 SBC car park tickets, library book receipts and information sent out via partners in the Democratic Information Network.

A valid petition had been received calling for a Community Governance Review to be undertaken with a view to the abolition of Billingham Town Council. The key dates for the review were listed within the report.

In 2011 legislation had been passed to reduce the number of MPs from 650 to 600, but the review of constituency boundaries that would have made the recommendations necessary to implement these changes had been halted because of disagreements within the previous Government over constitutional reform.

Under the law, a new review by the Boundary Commission had to be conducted after the 2015 General Election and completed by October 2018. It must again divide the UK into 600 constituencies.

Given the time required to complete boundary reviews, any changes to the Rules would have to be a priority for the new Government if the October 2018 deadline was to be met.

The election programme for next year would see Stockton lead on the PCC election for the Cleveland Force area. Preparation commenced on 4 August and would continue with regular updates to Lead Members throughout. In addition it was likely that there would be a request to undertake a Referendum on Europe. In addition, if greater devolution was given to the Sub Region, a Mayor may need to be elected.

The next steps were as follows:-

- Complete election accounts
- Maintain momentum with suppliers especially Adare and Royal Mail
- Continue planning for the 2016 PCC Elections with immediate effect, drafting the detailed management plans and scheduling Cleveland Force Area Planning Meetings
- Consult with the necessary stakeholders re the PCC election Arrangements
- Implement 2015 and Canvass Plans
- Implement Community Governance reviews
- Undertake preparation for any Boundary Review
- Implement recommendations as agreed

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

**C
48/15** **Community Governance Reviews – Billingham Town Council and Elton Parish Council**

Consideration was given to a report on the community governance review for Billingham Town Council

Following receipt of a community governance petition which called for the

abolition of Billingham Town Council, the report invited consideration of the proposed approach to a community governance review in response to the petition and also a review in relation to Elton Parish Council.

All principal councils had a legal duty to carry out a community governance review if they received a valid petition. For a community governance petition to be valid in an area of more than 2500 electors, as was the case with Billingham Town Council (27,080 electors), it must be signed by 7.5% of local government electors; define the area to which the review related, and specify one or more recommendations. This petition called for the abolition of Billingham Town Council. Under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 a principal council had the power to undertake a community governance review, and must set terms of reference that allowed for the petition to be considered. The petition received contained in excess of 2,700 signatures of which 2031 had been confirmed on the electoral register. The petition was therefore valid.

In addition it was noted that Elton Parish Council had not operated since 9 December 2008 when all of its Councillors had resigned. Following the resignations the process was followed to fill the casual vacancies and notices of vacancy were displayed on two separate occasions between December 2008 and May 2015. In addition, since the resignations there had been two scheduled Parish Elections and no nominations had been received. It was therefore proposed that a community governance review be conducted to consider the abolition of Elton Parish Council and that the detail, key stages and timeline of this review mirror that of Billingham Town Council. Key Stakeholders would include the MP and Ward Councillors.

The report highlighted the DCLG Guidance and the approaches to the review. The terms of reference for Billingham Town Council and Elton Parish Council were attached to the report.

The key stages of the reviews and the range of consultation mechanisms proposed were detailed within the report.

Members agreed that the Northern Locality Forum be included as a consultee to the process.

RESOLVED that:-

1. A Community Governance Review of Billingham Town Council commences following the receipt of the valid petition from residents.
2. A Community Governance Review of Elton Parish Council be undertaken following an extended period of inactivity.
3. The Terms of Reference for both Community Governance Reviews, timetables and consultation programmes be agreed.

C
49/15

Appointment to Council Outside Body 2015/19

At its Annual Meeting, held on Wednesday 3 June 2015, the Council approved appointments to its Committees, Panels and Joint/Outside Bodies for 2015/19.

The following nomination had been received and was presented for Council consideration:-

MALAP

Nomination - Councillor Elsi Hampton

RESOLVED that Councillor Elsi Hampton be appointed to MALAP.

C

50/15

Change of Date for Council

At its Annual Meeting, held on Wednesday 3 June 2015, the Council approved dates for the meetings of Council for 2015/16.

The following change of date was requested for Council consideration:-

Move 21st October 2015 to 28th October 2015

RESOLVED that the meeting of Council that was scheduled for 21st October 2015 be moved to 28th October 2015.

C

51/15

Members' Question Time

The following question has been submitted by Councillor Hall for response by the Leader of the Council:-

"How much has Fairview in Thorpe Thewles and Red Plains in Hartburn cost to run and have they made a profit since they opened? This partnership involves a split of profits; what percentage goes to SBC and to Spark of Genius(NE) – now Care Tech, since the takeover?"

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

"I am saddened, Councillor Hall, that as a corporate parent you choose to refer to your children in terms of profit and loss. You have quoted in the press costs of £800,000 but I am not prepared to debate costs of individual children, what I can tell you is the cost to the Council is nowhere near the figure you have quoted in the media in recent weeks. What I can also tell you is it can cost up to £200,000 per year per child to place our children out of the Borough – an arrangement none of us are happy with I'm sure.

The running of the homes is the responsibility of Spark of Genius, the company accounts for the costs. The Council accounts for the Joint Venture as a whole and as outlined to Cabinet in March 2013, pays market rent for children placed and receives lease payments for the properties plus a 50% share of the profit. This will save the Council £600,000 per year."

Councillor Hall asked the following supplementary question:-

"These long term homes for children in care are proving to be a very costly provision and I stand by my figures. We have not realised the savings that were

first envisaged or the overall upgrade of care.

On the January to June spread sheet it shows that SBC paid £1.2 million to Spark of Genius for 17 staff looking after 3 children. An additional £1 million has been paid to specialist providers on the list. For many more children we are talking 25 children instead of the 8 Spark of Genius are looking after.

Does the Leader consider this a false picture of saving money and does not match the reality and indeed is not fair proportionately to those children homed outside the Borough.

I must add that at the local government finance seminar on 13th May a question was asked to Gary Cummings (Head of Finance and Assets) "Could places be sold to other authorities?" The reply was the Council could consider this option. This goes against the Cabinet of March. Spark of Genius said they would not trade commercially. Will the Leader give assurances that Caretech will honour this agreement?

I am a corporate parent at Hartburn Lodge where we have had a children's home for a very long time and I don't like to be criticized for something I'm not doing.

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

"You are not just a corporate parent for Hartburn Lodge but for all the 300 plus children that are in our care.

Your own government recommended that children are educated and looked after inside the borough and this is what we are doing. We will be saving money in the long term as part of an invest to save programme. We will in the long term be saving £600k a year.

At the Cabinet meeting depending on what spaces were available at the homes it wasn't ruled out that children would be brought in from other areas. As Councillor Mrs McCoy said it will be done by very strict regulation.

Our agenda is to bring back as many looked after children back to the Borough and that is what we are planning to do."

The following questions were submitted by Councillor Vickers for response by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People:-

"As councillors, we have both a legal & moral responsibility for the welfare of children looked after by the council. Via what methods and processes are the standards in our children's homes monitored & what are the minimum standards expected of those managing homes on our behalf?" and

"Whilst a lot of attention is given to the Ofsted results achieved by our schools, little is given to the results of our children's homes. School OFSTED results are available to the boroughs parents and they have the freedom to move their children between schools accordingly, it is we, as corporate parents who have such a responsibility to look after the interests and welfare of some of the most

vulnerable young people in the borough. Of all the children's homes in the borough how many 'require improvement'?"

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People responded with:-

In response to the questions posed by Matthew Vickers with regards to the monitoring of the standards in our own Local Authority Children's homes I can assure members that there are robust systems in place. Each of our homes are inspected twice yearly by Ofsted and 4 of our 6 homes are currently judged as good and the other two as outstanding and one home that is requiring improvement.

In addition to this, our homes undergo a monthly monitoring visit from an independent person. In Stockton this person is a suitably experienced worker from NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service). These visits may be announced or unannounced. A report is produced by the independent person and submitted to Ofsted with any recommendations that are followed up with the homes manager at the next visit.

The Head of Service receives a copy of the report which sets out the independent person's opinion as to whether the children are effectively safeguarded and includes feedback on the quality of the care provided from the home.

In reaching an opinion the independent person consults with any person they see fit that is connected to the care of children in the home. This might include a Reviewing Officer, staff in the home, teacher and perhaps a health professional.

The independent person is expected to get feedback from parents, the social worker and most importantly the children. In addition to giving feedback based on observation and consultation with others the independent person may look at documentation in the home and will comment on any evidence or lack of in regards progress and the quality of care provided.

At least once every 6 months our Registered Manager of the home completes a review of the quality of care provided to the children in the home. Within this review the manager considers the opinions of children living in the home, their parents, social worker and staff. Any actions to improve or maintain the quality of care must be included in a written report of the review and then submitted to Ofsted.

Ward Members are invited to be a 'link person' for each of our homes in the Ward and are welcomed into the home as regular visitors. These visits are normally monthly but could be more often dependant on the relationship the link Councillor builds with the children. I have been told that for those homes who have had regular visits that this has worked very well over the years. The link person is viewed by the home very much as an ambassador for the children who have loved having someone who they view as important taking an interest in them. Feedback from staff has been positive with regard to the input and feedback from the link person they receive. This feedback has included comments about the environment, general observations as regards interactions between staff and children and is often used as part of the review the manager

undertakes. Our homes have through the link person had avenues made available to them that have assisted in them being a part of the local community.

Our homes have staff members in each of them that are 'champions' of the Young Inspectors Group. These champions support the group in their task of visiting and inspecting each home against a set of standards. The young inspectors are a group of children who have put themselves forward to inspect the homes and have produced the standards based on what they want and not what the homes manager or we think should be included. The group is made up of children from across all 6 of the homes and they take turns to inspect each other's home twice yearly. The group are supported to produce a written report with any recommendations that is submitted to the homes manager. These 'inspections' are taken very seriously by the homes managers and each produces an action plan in response to recommendations or suggestions from the children.

All of the children living in our homes and SPARK homes are encouraged to take part in the 'Let's Take Action Group'. This group of young people and children regularly get involved in development work and this is one of a number of ways looked after children have a voice and a say in services. The Corporate Director and I seek views from this group regularly and attend meetings as needed. I have invited our young person's ambassador to come along to the meetings.

Bench marking and sharing of good practice across the homes is viewed as a tool by which to monitor the improving or maintained standards in our homes and a system of how to do this has been introduced and each manager regularly visits a home they do not have management responsibility for and undertakes an audit of the home. A written report is produced and may include any recommendations and suggestions to improve practice in the home. The report is shared with the homes manager for action and any follow up and is helpful to inform the managers review of the home in his/her report to Ofsted.

Managers of our homes are regular attenders at Regional Local Authority meetings with other homes managers. Good practice is shared at these meetings and assists managers in maintaining or improving the standards within our homes.

Visits take place to our homes from social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers on an announced and unannounced basis. The progress and quality of care provided to the children is monitored in this way and forms the basis of the child's looked after review which is 6 monthly.

The Corporate Director and Head of Service take a keen interest in the progress our children are making and the quality of care they receive. They do visit the children in our homes. These visits are informal and something that I am told the majority of the children enjoy as this is an opportunity for them to tell 'senior officers' what it is like living in their home.

In response to the second part of the question posed by Matthew Vickers in regards to what is the minimum standard expected of those managing homes on our behalf. As in the case of all registered Children's homes, those

managed are expected to comply with the legal requirements as set out in the regulations and Quality Standards for Children's Homes. These are the standards and regulations Ofsted inspect against. The judgment made at these inspections is an indicator as to how effective the home is.

As in the case of those homes operated by SBC, the manager must appoint a person independent of the home to undertake monthly monitoring of the home and produce a written report as I have described already. That report is submitted to Ofsted. I am aware that both Red Plains and Fairview have such a system in place and that this person has a background in social work.

As is the case for the Local Authority run homes, the homes manager of both Red Plains and Fairview must at least 6 monthly complete a review of the quality of care provided to the children and like our homes the manager must consider the opinions of the children living in the home, their parents, social worker and staff as well as any other person involved in the care of the child. Any actions to improve or maintain the quality of care must be included in this written report and submitted to Ofsted. Ofsted use the manager's review and any reports from the independent person as part of the Inspection Process.

As in the case of all registered homes, Ofsted inspect Fairview and Red Plains twice a year. Fairview has been inspected twice since opening and is graded as 'good' and 'maintaining effectiveness'. Red Plains has been inspected once and is graded as "requiring improvement". Red Plains will receive a second inspection early next year.

SPARK is working towards evidencing 'improved effectiveness' from Red Plains at the next inspection. SPARK conducts quarterly internal audits. These audits are a method of monitoring and improving quality and are well embedded in the organisation. Experienced workers from within the organisation come from Scotland to Stockton to undertake these Quality Improvement audits at Red Plains and Fairview. The findings are a measure of progress and form the basis of any action plans to be put in place.

As in the case of our homes, social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers visit Red Plains and Fairview regularly. The progress of and the quality of care provided to the children is monitored in this way and as I have already stated forms the basis of the child's looked after review which is 6 monthly.

In addition to these methods of monitoring and improving quality our own staff undertake audits. A suitably qualified member of the Independent Resource Team visits Red Plains and Fairview to undertake monitoring of the quality of the care and effective safeguarding of the children in the homes. At these visits children are seen and spoken to about what it is like to live in the home. Written reports are produced and shared with the home, the report includes any recommendations and highlights any areas of good practice. SPARK has welcomed these visits and the homes managers have been open and receptive to advice and viewed this process as positive and helpful.

I am aware that SPARK are very keen to replicate the 'link person' model that Councillors have with our own homes and that the Corporate Director has approached the relevant Ward Members. I view this as an ideal opportunity for

Councillors to be directly a part of and compliment the monitoring process already in place. This will also give our children in Red Plains and Fairview the same opportunity as those in our own homes, that is to have an ambassador and someone they view as very important taking an interest in them.

To date Councillor Hall has indicated and has become the link person for Red Plains. There is currently no Ward Member linked with Fairview.

There is one home requiring improvement.

The other 7 homes are Good or Outstanding."

Councillor Vickers asked the following supplementary question:-

"As for the one that requires improvement I can't imagine a more badly run home. The home has gone through 3 different managers. Ofsted has said the home requires improvement in all areas. Furthermore despite being staffed by more than 17 staff the crime stats are comparable to those of a half-way house. The police have been called 62 times to a catalogue of different incidents.

Look at the Ofsted report and think of the 3 young people in danger. I ask Councillor Mrs McCoy to review the situation as it develops"

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People responded with:-

"What I would say to you and to every person in this chamber tonight is to look in your hearts and do you feel we need to give these young people the opportunity to become valid and important part of the community and that is what we are working towards. Spark of Genius have the same ambition for our children. There is no price on a children's future.

I'm saddened that we can't find it in our hearts to be understanding of children and give them the opportunity to experience what it is like to live in a loving caring and protected environment in a home. That is what we are striving for.

Somebody commented why are these children living in a big house and I say why not. We have children in our care from every area in this Borough and from every walk of life. It is our duty to ensure the future of these children. That is what I want you to think about tonight."

The following question has been submitted by Councillor Cherrett for response by the Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety:-

"How many Syrian refugees this borough is prepared to accept and what measures will be put in place to ensure that they are welcomed and helped to settle in our town?"

The Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety responded with:-

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Cherrett for the question. I welcome the opportunity to provide some clarity on this issue and can safely

say at the outset that we have all been shocked by the images we have seen in the national media and want to do all that is practical to assist.

Your question has two elements to it:

Firstly how many Syrian refugees this borough is prepared to accept?

I think it will be helpful to provide some background. Under existing dispersal schemes Stockton currently has 843 Asylum Seekers and 2337 Refugees (total 3180) successfully settled in the borough.

In terms of asylum seekers Stockton is currently at 90% of the threshold laid down by Government. Middlesbrough is even higher. Nationally Middlesbrough has the highest percentage figure and Stockton the third. Many authorities, mostly in the south, I understand have none or very few.

The reason for this disparity is that the company contracted to provide accommodation to asylum seekers has most of its properties on Teesside.

In light of the recent refugee crisis the Government has stated that it intends to provide refuge to some 20,000 Syrian refugees between now and 2020. To facilitate this it has set up the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme which does not replace but runs in parallel with existing schemes. This means that unlike most authorities Stockton will still be receiving new asylum seekers probably running into the hundreds regardless of the introduction of the new scheme.

All councils have just been asked how many refugees they can accommodate under the new scheme. For many councils this will give them the opportunity to accommodate refugees perhaps for the first time.

Whilst asking for raw numbers the Government, as usual, have been less than forthcoming with details as to funding refugees under the new scheme. Whilst there is reference to some initial one year funding to cover some costs there is effectively silence on funding for future years.

This is particularly unfortunate as the refugees to be accommodated are likely to be those needing greatest on-going support from councils. It very much looks like the old trick of central government passing responsibility to local government without properly funding it. And remember this new responsibility being passed onto councils is at a time when all councils, particularly those in the north east, are facing draconian cuts in their budgets. The Local Government Association is taking up these concerns on behalf of all councils.

Therefore our response at this stage is that we remain keen to offer in principle support to assist. We have said we would be happy to assist others with our experiences and learning if that would be of help. Therefore given our existing and future commitments to help asylum seekers and refugees, which like I said will probably run into the hundreds (outwith the recent Syrian announcement), it is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of numbers for this particular scheme. As our residents would expect we would want to carry out some more analysis and produce an evidential base to accurately reflect the understood needs, and our ability to meet them. And as stated previously there is also a

need for a better understanding of the sustainable funding required over and above the first year. It is fair to say therefore that the situation is somewhat fluid but that as a caring and responsible council Stockton won't be playing any knee jerk numbers games.

Part 2 of your question asks what measures will be put in place to support refugees. This suggests you think we currently don't offer support so you will be pleased to hear that we already are offering support to the thousands of asylum seekers and refugees already in the borough.

In terms of the Borough being prepared:-

- In June the Leader of the Council pledged Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's commitment to see the Tees Valley become a recognised 'City of Sanctuary' – a place where those escaping violence and persecution can seek refuge; Stockton was the only signatory.
- We have a long history of helping asylum seekers and those fleeing their own countries and have demonstrated our commitment to them for example by putting in additional support for asylum seekers and refugees to make sure they can access health and social care services through the Stockton Navigation Project;
- Along with ANEC and the other North Eastern councils we have been instrumental in re-establishing the North East Strategic Migration Partnership which is currently hosted by Middlesbrough. We also have a strong relationship with the voluntary and community sector who do so much to provide help and support to those who are escaping conflict and oppression.

In conclusion therefore the residents of the borough can be reassured that not only has Stockton Council more than played its part in offering sanctuary to the vulnerable over the years but it will continue to offer what help it can in a planned, rational and sensible manner."

Councillor Cherrett asked the following supplementary question:-

"My question is specific to the refugees from the Syrian crisis. I'm personally aware of Stockton's involvement with asylum seekers and refugees. In terms of housing and you referred to Jomast, there have been reports in the press that Syrian refugees might take up social housing. Can you comment whether that is correct? And if so I would like to know where this empty social housing is?"

The Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety responded with:-

"The government is asking local authorities how many refugees they can accommodate in terms of everything. Housing is just one of these factors. As I understand it they are asking what private accommodation is also available. Housing is just one side of it, there is also education and social services etc.

The government will not commit to the proper funding for a scheme and yet they are asking councils to commit and almost write a blank cheque."

Since the Council had last met on the 22nd July, Cabinet met on the 10th September and considered reports on:-

- School performance and pupil attainment
 - Amendments to the Scheme of Delegation for the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
 - The Volunteering Strategy for the Borough
 - The Affordable Warmth and Fuel Poverty Strategy
 - The 2014/15 Adults Social Care Local Account
 - The Medium Term Financial Plan.
 - The Annual Local Government Ombudsman's report on Complaints
 - The Shaping a Brighter Future programme
 - Planning for the future – managing transition
 - A Review of the 2015 Elections and an Update on 2015 Canvass; Community Governance Reviews; the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections and Parliamentary Review
- And,
- Durham Tees Valley Airport

Looking ahead, Cabinet next meets on the 8th October and was scheduled to consider reports on:-

- The 2014 Care Act
- The Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards.
- Older People's Care Home Consultation proposals
- The Children & Young People's Plan 2015 - 2018
- Further detail on School Performance and Pupil Attainment regarding vulnerable groups.
- The Coroner's Service
- A Review of the Council's Private Hire & Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy
- A Review of the Council's Sex Establishment Licensing Policy
- Projects and interventions across the Borough's town centres.
- The Scrutiny Review of Choice Based Lettings

In other business the Leader of the Council was involved in discussions with Tees Valley Colleagues in devolution negotiations and was hopeful to be in the final stages of discussions to secure a devolution deal around economic growth, skills and transport. There was a Members' Policy Seminar in the calendar for November to discuss this matter in more detail however the Leader of the Council was conscious that the timetable on the negotiations may be moving more quickly than originally envisaged so a special meeting of Cabinet and Council may need to be arranged to consider the devolution proposals. The Leader of the Council would keep Members informed on progress before next full Council on the 28th October 2015.