

Council

A meeting of Council was held on Tuesday, 21st November, 2017.

Present: The Worshipful the Mayor (Cllr Maurice Perry); Cllr Sonia Bailey, Cllr Paul Baker, Cllr Chris Barlow, Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Derrick Brown, Cllr Julia Cherrett, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Gillian Corr, Cllr Evaline Cunningham, Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Lisa Grainge, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr David Harrington, Cllr Di Hewitt, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Mohammed Javed, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Paul Kirton, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Mrs Kathryn Nelson, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell, Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr Lauriane Povey, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Paul Rowling, Cllr Michael Smith, Cllr Andrew Stephenson, Cllr Norma Stephenson O.B.E, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Laura Tunney, Cllr Matthew Vickers, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Paul Weston, Cllr Julia Whitehill, Cllr David Wilburn, Cllr Norma Wilburn, Cllr Bill Woodhead MBE and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

Officers: Neil Schneider (CE), Julie Danks, Peter Bell, Jenna McDonald (DCE), Beccy Brown, Jonathan Nertney (HR, L&C), Garry Cummings (F&BS), Chris Renahan (E,G&D), Jamie McCann (CS), Ann Workman (AH); Reuben Kench (CL&E).

Also in attendance: Bob Gibson O.B.E and Freeman of the Borough.
Maureen Rigg, Suzanne Fletcher and John Fletcher (Stockton Fairtrade Borough Partnership).
Members of the Public.

Apologies: Cllr Helen Atkinson, Cllr Chris Clough, Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Phil Dennis, Cllr Elsie Hampton, Cllr Tony Hampton, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Tracey Stott and Cllr Sally Ann Watson.

C 75/17 Welcome and Evacuation Procedure

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

The Worshipful the Mayor also welcomed Councillor Sylvia Walmsley back to Council.

C 76/17 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

C 77/17 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2017 were signed by the Worshipful the Mayor as a correct record.

C 78/17 Former Councillor Pete Andrew

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

C 79/17 Renewal of Fairtrade Borough Status

Maureen Rigg, Suzanne Fletcher and John Fletcher (Stockton Fairtrade Borough Partnership) were in attendance at the meeting and presented the Worshipful the Mayor and the Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety with a certificate from the Fairtrade Foundation to certify that Stockton-on-Tees had renewed its status as a Fairtrade Borough.

C 80/17 Public Question Time

The Chief Solicitor informed Members that no Public Questions had been received.

**C
81/17** **Additional Borrowing Associated with a Crematorium with Two Chapels**

Consideration was given to a report that sought approval, to build a second chapel at the crematorium and to incur the additional Prudential Borrowing required.

The decision to build and manage the Council's own Crematorium was approved by Cabinet on 20 April 2017 and then by Council on 3 May 2017. Prudential borrowing was agreed for up to £6.35m which would provide a facility, two cremators and one chapel.

Since the project began officers had had further opportunity to collect examples of best practice from other operators of crematoria around the UK, seek further views of a range of service users and agencies, as well as firm up on construction costs and consider demand and disruption.

As the project had developed, best practice had been sought and information and views from service users and agencies had been gathered. As a result it had been established that many people choose to have a smaller service as they may prefer that only a small circle of friends or relatives attend the crematorium and this would be difficult to accommodate from a single chapel, albeit it was acknowledged that some modification to the single chapel could be made to accommodate more intimate Services.

As part of the intensive research into national best practice, Officers visited many locations which included a visit to Rainsbrook Crematorium (Rugby Borough Council & Daventry District Council), opened in April 2014 with two chapels – one seating 120, the second seating 50 mourners which were the similar numbers as those proposed for Stockton.

Following further consultation, the Crematorium Manager had confirmed that since opening the bookings for each chapel had remained a 50/50 split. Bookings for the smaller chapel were predominantly driven by the customer's personal choice and those who simply want a committal service.

Two chapels would provide more availability and / or double the amount of 'preferred times' i.e. consider large chapel with services every hour, smaller chapel on the half hour which would prevent delays.

In addition it had been established that there may be times when committal only services were required. This was when the funeral service may take place at the families own place of worship with a short committal service in the crematorium chapel – potentially a service of this nature would take 10 minutes, yet we would be tying up the large chapel for 45 minutes. (As with all funerals, the reception of the coffin in the committal room and its introduction into a cremator can be witnessed by prior arrangement).

Direct cremation was also becoming more popular. This when the body of the person who had died was cremated (or buried) without a funeral ceremony.

Funeral poverty was also becoming more of an issue, one in seven people were experiencing financial difficulty when paying for a funeral. Alternative services which treat all people with dignity and respect needed to be provided.

The introduction of a second chapel would allow progress the services above and provide customers with flexible and varied service options to meet need.

The work that had been done in preparation for Stockton's own Crematorium had involved a significant amount of research both through contact with the Institute of Cemeteries and Crematoria (ICCM), benchmarking visits to other providers (ran by LA's and the private sector) as well as using the services of an experienced Consultant.

This work had confirmed that the business case stacked up for Stockton, both in terms of meeting the needs of the communities as well as from a financial payback model. It was acknowledged that the maximum operating capacity of a single chapel is 1668 cremations per year (based on 33 cremations per week from 9.15am through to 4.00pm every day). For information, Teesside Crematorium currently undertakes 2932 cremations (figures as at 2014).

In preparing the original business case it was felt that it would be several years before this maximum was exceeded. Figures issued by the Office of National Statistics however, had revealed that this could be sooner than we had originally expected. These figures related to the number of deaths in the Borough so did not reflect decisions around burial or cremation (although cremation was by far the most popular 81% favouring this currently), nor do they reflect decisions about service level or location. Nonetheless, it was expected that the maximum could be reached as early as year 8.

Once exceeded a second chapel would need to be built. Current estimates were this would cost circa £1m. The Council could wait to do this until it had been delivering the service for a period which would help to firm up usage numbers, however this would incur additional cost and would disrupt the service.

If the Council were to install the second chapel after the initial build it would incur an additional 40% cost i.e. circa £1.4m rather than £1m and it would lose the opportunity in the early years, of the differing service levels outlined above.

In addition there would be significant risks in relation to business continuity due to the scale of works associated with the retro fitting of a second chapel. It may be necessary to close the facility for a period of time. If it was possible to keep the facility open whilst undertaking the works, it was likely that some disruption to customers may occur. It was also noted that there was risk of some reputation damage, if Stockton had failed to future proof the facility by adding on a second chapel less than 10 years after it was opened.

Given the above it was recommended that the second chapel be built as part of the initial build. Additional borrowing of £1m was required. This would mean an additional annual cost of £66k per year (including some additional running costs), which could be accommodated within the surplus outlined in the original report to Council (£1.87m by year 10). Given the additional capacity it was expected that the surplus would be higher.

RESOLVED that the construction of a second chapel be supported with associated increase in prudential borrowing, to ensure that Stockton's Crematorium provides flexible service levels and is future proofed continuing to serve the needs of our community now and in the years to come.

**C
82/17** **Welfare Reform Update Q2 2017-18**

Consideration was given to a report that provided an update on the monitoring of outcomes and impacts of welfare reform and a summary of actions undertaken by the Council to mitigate against circumstances arising from the implementation of these changes.

Regular reports on welfare reform had been provided to Cabinet for several years, providing updates with regard to the further roll-out of welfare reforms and interventions the Council was making to manage the impact on residents.

Trends had been identified and monitored such as heightened activity around benefit sanctions, increases in the use of local food banks and shifts in the rented housing sector from social to private landlords.

The Local Government Finance Act imposed a duty upon local councils from 2013-14 to adopt a Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTSS), to replace Council Tax Benefit. Members considered a number of options for Stockton's LCTSS and, following public consultation, agreed on the "shared reduction" option with all working age claimants paying a minimum contribution of 20% of the Council Tax charge.

Members recommended to Council that the existing LCTSS be retained for the financial year 2018-19. LCTSS were not fully funded so there could be some impact on the medium term financial plan and reports would be provided as part of the financial report to Cabinet. Any future scheme review would require full consultation with the public.

Cabinet at its meeting on 16 November 2017 had RESOLVED that:-

1. The contents of the report be noted.
2. The performance monitoring outcomes and observations provided be noted.

Council RESOLVED that:-

3. The current Local Council Tax Support Scheme be retained for the financial year 2018-19.

**C
83/17** **Dispensation Councillor Tracy Stott**

Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 provided that where a council member failed, throughout a period of six consecutive months, to attend any

meeting of the authority then the Member ceases to be a member of the authority, unless the failure was due to some reason approved by the authority before the expiry of that period.

Councillor Tracey Stott was incapacitated due to illness and had been unable to attend any meeting of the authority for a period in excess of 5 months. Councillor Tracey Stott was unlikely to be in a position to attend a meeting in the near future and had requested that Council considers granting her a dispensation.

RESOLVED that Councillor Tracey Stott be granted a dispensation to allow her to remain qualified until such time as she is able to attend a meeting of the Council.

**C
84/17** **Change of the Date of Council**

Consideration was given to a report that informed Members of the following officer decision, taken under urgency provisions, in consultation with the Mayor:-

The Chief Executive Officer took the decision, in consultation with the Mayor and Deputy Chief Executive Officer, to cancel the scheduled meeting of Council on 22 November 2017 and reschedule it for 21 November 2017.

Due to the number of potential absentees it was considered necessary to reschedule the meeting of Full Council from 22 November 2017 to 21 November 2017.

RESOLVED that the Chief Executive's decision, taken in consultation with the Mayor and Deputy Chief Executive Officer, be noted.

**C
85/17** **Appointments / Amendments to Committees and Panel for 2017/19**

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 appointment / amendments had been received and were presented for Council consideration:-

Durham, Darlington and Teesside, Hambleton, Richmondshire and Whitby Sustainability and Transformation Plan Joint Health Scrutiny Committee

Add Councillor Sonia Bailey to the vacancy (seat formerly held by former Councillor Alan Mitchell)

Crime and Disorder Select Committee

Add Councillor Paul Weston to the vacancy (seat formerly held by former Councillor Alan Mitchell)

Executive Scrutiny Committee

Remove Councillor Tracey Stott
Add Councillor Norma Stephenson

Durham Tees Valley Airport Board

Remove Councillor Bob Cook
Remove Councillor Jim Beall
Add Councillor David Wilburn

RESOLVED that the above appointment / amendment be agreed.

C
86/17 **Members' Question Time**

The Chief Solicitor informed Members that no Member Questions had been received.

C
87/17 **Forward Plan and Leader's Statement**

The Leader of the Council gave his Forward Plan and Leaders Statement.

Before the Leader of the Council provided his normal update he took the opportunity to reflect back on the last Council meeting on the 20th September 2017 and reminded Members of the motion that was passed condemning the Conservative Government plans to cap Housing Benefit at Local Housing Allowance rates in social housing. The Leader of the Council was delighted to hear that the Prime Minister had announced that these plans had been scrapped. The Leader of the Council was satisfied to see that a Conservative Prime Minister had seen the sense in the argument.

On other matters it had been a busy time since the last meeting of Council on 20 September. Cabinet met on the 12th of October and on the 16th November 2017 and considered:

- The "Adoption Tees Valley" Business Case
- The School Organisation Plan
- The Strategic review of Education
- An update on the Armed Forces Covenant
- Feedback from the Borough-Wide Conversation
- An update on Victoria Housing Regeneration
- The regular Economic Climate Report
- An update on the Preston Park masterplan
- A report on the proposed merger of the Teesside and Hartlepool Coroner areas.
- Proposals for the incorporation of Transport for the North as a sub-National Transport Body
- Mid-year update reports on the Council Plan performance, Children's Services performance and Welfare Reforms
- Proposals to create Targeted Action Areas
- An update on the Governing Body and the annual report for the Learning and Skills service
- An update on Counter Terrorism

- The proposal for additional borrowing for the crematorium
- Cabinet also considered 4 excellent reports from Select Committees on:
 - The Membership of Local Government Bodies
 - Asylum Seeker services
 - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
 - Defibrillators

Cabinet would next meet on the 14th of December 2017 and consider reports on:

- Education Performance for Vulnerable Groups
- The LSCB Annual Report
- The Annual Audit Letter
- The Domestic Abuse Policy
- The MTFP Quarter 2 Report
- The Select Committee Review of Sickness Absence
- The Homelessness Reduction Bill 2017
- The Housing and Planning Act 2016
- An update on the consultation relating to the Licensing Act 2003
- An update on the consultation relating to Private Hire & Hackney

Carriage Licensing Policy

- An update on Volunteering in the borough

And,

- An update on the Street Lighting Replacement Scheme

The Leader of the Council was looking forward to the launch of Stockton Sparkles which promised to be a great occasion and also marked the start of lots of great Christmas events taking place across the Borough. The Leader of the Council hoped Members would enjoy them and looked forward to seeing everyone at the next meeting of Council on the 20th December 2017.