

Council

A meeting of Council was held on Wednesday, 24th March, 2021.

Present: The Worshipful the Mayor (Cllr Mohammed Javed); Cllr Helen Atkinson, Cllr Louise Baldock, Cllr Chris Barlow, Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Jacky Bright, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Evaline Cunningham, Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Clare Gamble, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Paul Kirton, Cllr Tina Large, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr David Minchella, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell, Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr Maurice Perry, Cllr Lauriane Povey, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Michael Smith, Cllr Norma Stephenson O.B.E, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Laura Tunney, Cllr Hilary Vickers, Cllr Steve Walmsley, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Alan Watson, Cllr Sally Ann Watson, Cllr Paul Weston, Cllr Julia Whitehill, Cllr Bill Woodhead MBE and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

Officers: Julie Danks (MD); Margaret Waggott, Nigel Hart, Michael Henderson, Sarah Whaley, Peter Bell (DS); Beccy Brown, Jonathan Nertney (HR,L&C), Garry Cummings (FDBS), Ann Workman (AS), Martin Gray (ChS), Reuben Kench (ECLE), Richard McGuckin (TCI), Jamie McCann (CS).

Also in attendance: Members of the public.

Apologies: Cllr Luke Frost and Cllr Stefan Houghton.

C **Welcome** **56/20**

The Worshipful the Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the arrangements for the meeting.

C **Minute's Silence** **57/20**

Members stood in a minute's silence as a mark of respect for all the people who had lost their lives due to the covid pandemic.

C **Declarations of Interest** **58/20**

Councillor Clare Gamble declared a personal non prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 6 - Private Hire & Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy - Review 2021 as she had a family member who was taxi driver and was licensed by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council.

C **Minutes** **59/20**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meetings held on 27 January and 24 February 2021.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 January and 24 February 2021 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

C **Public Question Time** **60/20**

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

C **Private Hire & Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy - Review 2021** **61/20**

Consideration was given to a report on the Private Hire & Hackney Carriage

Licensing Policy - Review 2021

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

The current Private Hire & Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy was approved in 2016 and amended in 2018 and again in 2019.

In July 2020 the Department for Transport published the 'Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards'. Which it recommended all Local Authorities adopt.

The current policy already included some of these statutory standards, and in this policy review it was proposed all the Department for Transport's standards were adopted in full.

A 31-day period of consultation was undertaken giving all stakeholders opportunity to comment on the proposed changes. 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).

Other local authorities, responsible authorities including the Police and all Council Members were sent the link via email on the 7 December 2020 and given an opportunity to comment on the proposed changes.

Details of the policy review and how to make comments were also advertised to the public via library notice boards. The consultation had now closed, there were 13 responses the majority in favour of the proposed changes. Details of the responses were attached to the report.

The Licensing Committee considered the draft policy and consultation document on 15 January 2021 and had no further comments to make.

Cabinet considered the matter at its meeting held on 25 February 2021 and a copy of the relevant minute extract was attached to the report.

If approved, it was proposed that the revised policy would be implemented on 1 April 2021.

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 would be added to future trade meeting agendas.

RESOLVED 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 1st April 2021.

**C
62/20**

Sex Establishment Licensing Policy - Review 2021

Consideration was given to a report on Sex Establishment Licensing Policy - Review 2021.

Council considered the views and comments received from Cabinet, the Licensing Committee and other interested parties following consultation on the Sex Establishment Licensing Policy.

The original Sex Establishment Licensing Policy was agreed in 2011 and reviewed in 2015 when minor revisions were agreed.

Since the adoption of the original policy in April 2011, no applications for a Sex Establishment Licence had been received by the Authority and no issues or concerns had been raised. There had been no changes to legislation or to the Home Office guidance issued in 2010.

As a result, it was proposed that the current policy remained relatively unchanged. A copy of the draft policy was emailed to all members on 14 December 2020.

A log of proposed changes was attached to the report.

The proposal to readopt the policy was sent via email to all Members and Responsible Authorities under the Licensing Act, namely Cleveland Police, Children's Services, Environmental Health, Cleveland Fire Service Public Health and Planning.

Comments received and any additional information was attached to the report.

The adoption of a policy for Sex Establishments was not statutory but allowed the Council to outline its views for applicants about issues such as suitability of applicants, the number of establishments and where they could be located. In determining applications Members and Officers would have due regard to the Policy whilst considering each application on its merits. It was proposed that review period should be 5 yearly for this Policy.

If approved, it was proposed that the revised policy would be implemented on 1 April 2021.

The Policy would then be due for a further review by the end of 2026.

Cabinet considered the matter at its meeting held on 25 February 2021 and a copy of the relevant minute extract was attached to the report.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The content of this report be noted.
2. The proposed Sex Establishment Licensing Policy be approved with an

implementation date of 1st April 2021.

**C
63/20** **Council Plan 2021-24**

Council was invited to approve the proposed Council Plan 2021-24.

The Plan set out the Council's vision for the Borough looking forward to 2024, and the key priorities the Council would be working on in the coming year to bring the vision to life.

The plan contained objectives designed to enable the Council to be:-

- A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm
- A place that is clean, vibrant and attractive
- A place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed.

RESOLVED that the Council Plan for 2021-24 be approved.

**C
64/20** **Members' Question Time**

The following question had been submitted by Councillor Ted Strike for response by the Leader of the Council:-

“Following the vote on the council tax increase last month I received this email from a resident,

“I want to send a message of thanks for trying to battle the proposed and now ratified rise in council tax. These people have no idea what it is like at the moment to try and survive and obviously have no care about their local communities. What is more important at the moment? Redeveloping or allowing people to feed their children? People will say it is only a few pounds, but what about those people who really are on the breadline? Quite frankly this stinks. I appreciate you trying.”

Can the leader of the council tell this resident and the many, many, more who contacted me over increased council tax when they can expect to see the annual rise start to reduce from the now traditional 1.9% each year? Also is there any hope in sight that these residents could ever see a freeze in council tax under this Labour led council?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“As I have said on many occasions, no one wants to raise Council Tax, however this must be seen in the context that over the past 10 years or so we have seen funding from Central Government reduce by over £70m per year. We have made budget savings of £45m per year and now employ 1200 fewer staff whilst still delivering the same services. If we had not taken the difficult decision it would have meant even more cuts to vital front-line services such as support for our elderly and vulnerable residents.

A significant proportion of the costs relate to Social Care and I firmly believe that these costs should be directly funded by the Government and have raised this issue many times, unfortunately this has not been addressed. Instead, Government assume Local Authorities increase Council Tax to cover these costs.

We have a responsibility to set a balanced budget and we need Government to provide a long-term commitment to funding before we can consider any changes to Council Tax levels. But we understand that some residents are really struggling and that's why we are supporting 12000 residents on low incomes with £150 payment towards their Council Tax."

The following question had been submitted by Councillor Ted Strike for response by the Leader of the Council:-

"Can the Leader of the Council tell me when he expects to be in a position to inform the members of when the revenue from investments the council has previously made will begin to support vital local services and thereby reducing the annual burden placed on hard hit council tax payers?"

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

"We're very ambitious for the Borough and have made a number of strategic investments to make it a better place both now and for future generations.

We've invested in schools, in housing, in leisure centres – like the new one in Ingleby Barwick – and of course, in our town centres.

But we make investments for all kinds of reasons.

Councillor Strike doesn't say which investments he has in mind but I know he's got a long-standing interest in our Hampton by Hilton hotel.

He'll be aware that after a great start, the pandemic has of course seen the hotel make a loss this year, and we've had funding to cover that.

But nobody with any sense would judge a hotel's long-term prospects on the back of its performance during a global pandemic.

It was always a long-term investment and it's one we fully expect to generate a return to the council in future years.

It's also a great asset to have in the Borough just ask the Chancellor I'm sure he enjoyed his recent stay there!

As for hard hit Council Tax payers, the thing that's hitting them the hardest is the Government's refusal to fully fund social care.

If they did then councils across the country wouldn't have to put up Council Tax."

Councillor Ted Strike asked the following supplementary question:-

“Will the Leader of the Council put all future borrowings on hold until the Council’s current borrowing shows a profit not a predicted profit and will he arrange a members briefing session to inform Councillors all of our current and future borrowing?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“I’m sure we can arrange a seminar on the reasons why the Council has borrowed money. I can’t give any authorisation to put any future borrowing on hold as this is all part of the MTFP which this Council actually is responsible for and the MTFP was agreed just last month. You may have voted against the Plan Councillor Strike, but many other Councillors voted in favour of the Plan and the Plan was agreed at the meeting as a way forward for this Borough.”

As Councillor Luke Frost was not in attendance at the meeting, he would receive a written response to his questions.

C 65/20 Forward Plan and Leader’s Statement

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

Members last met as a full Council on the 24th February and since then Cabinet had met twice first on the 25th of February and then on the 18th March when it considered the following matters:

- The Annual Audit Letter
 - A report on Brexit
 - A report on the procedure for admission of pupils to primary and secondary schools in September 2022.
 - An update on the Employee Survey and Investor in People reassessment
 - The Annual procurement plan and higher value contracts
 - The Private Hire and Hackney Carriage and Sex Establishment Licensing Policy reviews
- and
- The 2021-2024 Council Plan

Looking ahead, Cabinet would next meet on the 22nd April and the 20th May and consider :

- A Covid update report
 - An update on the investment strategy for schools, SEND and early years settings
 - The RIPA monitoring report
 - A report on Care Home Fees
 - The Volunteering Strategy
 - A report on tackling food poverty in the Borough
- and
- Reports from the Scrutiny reviews of fraud awareness and burial provision

After that the Leader of the Council looked forward to seeing you all at the next

meeting which would be the annual meeting on the 26th of May.

Until then the Leader of the Council hoped that Members all stayed safe and well and hope that the Covid situation would continue to improve.