

Council

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

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

Officers: Julie Danks, Margaret Waggott, Nigel Hart, Rachel Harrison, John Devine, Peter Bell (MD), Beccy Brown, Julie Butcher (HR&L), Garry Cummings,(F,D&BS), Martin Gray (CHS), Reuben Kench (CL&E), Jamie McCann (CS), Ann Workman (AH).

Also in attendance: Members of the Public.

Apologies: Cllr Jacqueline Bright, Cllr David Minchella, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Steve Walmsley, Cllr Sylvia Walmley and Cllr Alan Watson.

C Welcome

37/21

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

C Declarations of Interest

38/21

Councillors Jean O'Donnell, Paul Kirton, Helen Atkinson, Jim Beall, Lynn Hall, Steve Matthews, Hilary Vickers, Lee Spence, Sally Ann Watson, Marilyn Surtees, Ted Strike, Tina Large, Tony Riordan, Julie Whitehill and Luke Frost all declared personal prejudicial interests in respect of agenda item 8 – Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTR) as they or a member of their family or a close associate benefits from the Council Tax Reduction scheme or could, due to the proposed changes, benefit from, or be disadvantaged by, the new scheme. All those Councillors who had declared an interest withdrew from the meeting and left the room during consideration of the item.

C Presentation of MOD Employee Gold Award

39/21

The Borough had a long and proud history of supporting the armed forces. The Council was one of the first to sign the Armed Forces Covenant in February 2012 pledging to deliver the Covenant principles in the area:

- Firstly, by seeking to ensure that the local armed forces community was not disadvantaged as a result of their military service; and
- Secondly, by seeking to ensure they had the same access to goods and services as any other citizen of our country.

Several years ago, the Ministry of Defence introduced its 'Employer Recognition Scheme' with 3 award levels Bronze, Silver and Gold to recognise organisations who had supported the armed forces and encouraged and inspired others to do the same.

Having previously been awarded the MOD's bronze and silver awards in 2016, the Worshipful the Mayor was delighted to say that the MOD had selected the Council as a 'Gold Award winner' in its 2021 Employer Recognition Scheme for being a champion supporter and advocate for the defence community.

At the core of this achievement was the backing of the Council, the Corporate Management Team, and the Armed Forces Champion, to establish a Covenant Steering Group consisting of internal and external 'Covenant Champions' from across the Council's services, and its partners (such as housing, education, social care, customer services, benefits, employment, business development, and the clinical commissioning group).

The Worshipful the Mayor presented the Armed Forces Champion, Councillor Bob Cook with the Gold Award. The Worshipful the Mayor thanked all those involved for their hard work and commitment, which had helped bring this national recognition to the Council; and given a strong platform to continue making progress in helping, supporting and honouring our armed forces community.

C
40/21 **Minutes**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2021.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2021 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

C
41/21 **Public Question Time**

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

C
42/21 **Constitution Update**

Consideration was given to a report on the Constitution Update.

All Local Authorities in England had a statutory duty under the Local Government Act 2000 to maintain an up-to-date Constitution and to make their Constitution publicly available.

In addition, para 1.37 of the Stockton on Tees Borough Council Constitution includes the following provisions:

Para 1.37 "The Monitoring Officer on behalf of and in consultation with the Managing Director, will monitor and review the operation of the Constitution on a regular basis, in order to ensure that it is up to date and may make amendments to ensure that legislative references are updated, it reflects the Councils structures and decision-making requirements and any other required changes are made."

Para. 2.4 "The Council will adopt the Council's Constitution and approve amendments to it (except where specifically delegated to the Monitoring

Officer)”

The report sought Council approval for the changes required to update the version of the Constitution which was considered and approved by Council in November 2020.

RESOLVED that the proposed amendments identified in the report and supporting papers be approved.

C Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTR)

43/21

Consideration was given to a report on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTR).

Further to consultation approved by Cabinet in June 2021 in respect of proposed changes to the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTR), formal consultation had been completed and responses analysed.

The proposed new scheme approved for consultation in June 2021 included a number of features, examples included:

- More support shall be given to those households on the lowest of incomes than in the current scheme;
- Those on the lowest incomes paying no council tax at all;
- Households with higher levels of income will receive less/no CTR;
- The current means-tested schemes will be replaced by a simple income grid model;
- Protection for low-income families with non-dependants living at home;
- Income such as child benefit, disability benefits and personal independent payments will be disregarded;
- An earnings disregard to encourage work will be retained however this will be standardised at £25 per week;
- The current savings allowance of £6,000 will continue but where savings are held above this threshold there will be no entitlement to CTR; (note proposed further change to capital allowance referred to at paragraph 6 of the report).

The consultation produced responses from organisations, major preceptors and the public; with 133 completed questionnaires, a summary of which was included in Appendix B to the report and revealed that the consultees supported the recommended new CTR scheme with a majority in agreement with all 9 principles. Only two of these principles returned a less than 6% majority, the details of which were summarised.

The number of households claiming CTR increased suddenly as a result of Covid-19 rising from 11,421 working age claimants in March 2020 to 12,597 in July 20. Numbers were now showing a steady decline with the total number reducing to 11,681 at 30 September 2021. Since the full roll out of Universal Credit commenced in Stockton in 2018, the make-up of the claimant base had seen a shift from a majority of claimants receiving housing benefit to a majority receiving universal credit.

One of the features of universal credit was that it was responsive to changes in

household income month by month. This meant that people might find that their universal credit was adjusted on a near monthly basis and each time universal credit is adjusted, there is an impact on CTR, resulting in a new council tax bill being sent. The proposed new income banded CTR scheme addressed this issue with small changes no longer triggering an adjustment. This made it much less volatile to claimants and much easier to understand.

The proposed scheme also provided additional support for the most financially vulnerable residents, providing 100% reduction to the lowest income households. Modelling had continued since the last report to Cabinet in June 2021; the reducing caseload now suggesting that under the proposed scheme 8,707 (72.5%) will receive more support including 7,437 households that will no longer have to pay council tax at all. With the scheme targeting the lowest income households, some households with higher levels of income will be adversely affected; modelling suggests this would be 2,665. Of the 2,665 households that are adversely affected, 2040 (76.5%) will still be eligible for a reduction of either 50% or 25% depending on their household income; 625 (23.5%) will no longer be eligible for CTR these being households with higher income levels.

Under Section 13A (1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the Council's exceptional hardship scheme already exists to support households whose financial circumstances impact their ability to pay council tax. In order to protect households that are adversely affected by the changes and where any applicant is likely to experience exceptional hardship, they will be encouraged to apply for an exceptional hardship payment. The Council will consider all applications for exceptional hardship on an individual basis, taking into account available income and essential outgoings.

Ahead of the proposed scheme coming into force on 1 April 2022, households that are adversely affected will be identified and contacted with details of the changes and offering support as appropriate.

In addition to this support for residents experiencing exceptional hardship, residents will be supported through the Council's welfare support team to maximise their income and through the Employment and Training Hub to help support people into employment.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The Council Tax Reduction scheme, included at Appendix A to the report, be adopted for working age customers with effect from 1 April 2022.
2. The Director of Finance, Development and Business Services be authorised to amend the Council's Council Tax Reduction scheme for working age customers to adjust the appropriate calculative elements of the scheme to give effect to national changes.
3. The impact of the changes be monitored and where necessary the scheme will be adapted in future years.

**C
44/21** **Amendments / Appointment to Committees 2021-23**

At its Annual Meeting, held on Wednesday 22 May 2019, the Council approved appointments to its Committees, Panels and Joint/Outside Bodies for 2019/23. Council was asked to consider the following:-

Executive Scrutiny Committee

Remove - Cllr Norma Stephenson
Add - Cllr Barbara Inman

TVCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Remove - Cllr Chris Barlow and Cllr Norma Stephenson
Add - Cllr Pauline Beall and Cllr Steve Nelson

TVCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Named Substitutes

Remove - Cllr Pauline Beall
Add - Cllr Norma Stephenson

SACRE

Add – Cllr Maurice Perry

RESOLVED that the amendments / appointment be approved.

**C
45/21** **Motion**

The following motion had been submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.40 moved by Cllr Tony Riordan, seconded by Cllr Lynn Hall:-

“In early October, Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps, announced that a competition will be run to identify the new headquarters for GBR, the single, accountable public body that will be responsible for running Britain’s railways from 2023.

The Transport Secretary has committed that the national headquarters will be based outside of London and the competition is set to recognise towns and cities with a rich railway history.

Stockton’s rich railway history makes it a perfect contender to be the new home of Great British Rail. A dinner held in Stockton Town Hall in 1810 led to the creation of the Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR). In 1822, the first rail was laid for the S&DR at St John’s Well in Stockton. In 1825, the first ever rail passenger was booked at the world’s oldest ticket office in Stockton.

Stockton South MP, Matt Vickers, has recently launched a campaign to bring Great British Railway’s headquarters to Stockton in order to secure new skilled jobs and investment for the area. The bid already has the backing of former Cabinet minister and presenter of ‘Great British Railway Journeys’, Michael Portillo, who has previously called Stockton “the start of the world’s railways”.

This Council:

- 1) Supports the campaign to establish the new headquarters of Great British Railways in Stockton.
 - a. Commits to writing to the Transport Secretary in support of the campaign.
- 2) Regrets that Stockton's rich local railway heritage has been overlooked and neglected.
 - a. Commits to seeking more opportunities to commemorate and celebrate Stockton's link with the world's railways."

Moved by Cllr Jim Beall, seconded by Cllr Bob Cook that the substantive motion be amended as follows:-

"Delete recommendation 2 and 2a.

Replace with:

- 2) Notes Stockton's vital contribution to the birth of passenger railways.
 - a. Commits to seeking more opportunities to commemorate and celebrate Stockton's railway heritage, in particular through the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the inaugural journey, in 2025."

Following a debate a vote took place and the amendment was carried and therefore the amendment became the substantive motion.

No further amendments were moved so a vote then took place on the substantive motion.

The substantive motion was carried as follows:-

"This Council:

- 1) Supports the campaign to establish the new headquarters of Great British Railways in Stockton.
 - a. Commits to writing to the Transport Secretary in support of the campaign.
- 2) Notes Stockton's vital contribution to the birth of passenger railways.
 - a. Commits to seeking more opportunities to commemorate and celebrate Stockton's railway heritage, in particular through the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the inaugural journey, in 2025."

C
46/21

Members' Question Time

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

"How can a 21-year-old sports complex get into such a bad state that it needs demolishing and replacing? Where would the money have come from if we had not bought Dunedin House and "saved" £24m?"

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“The report to Cabinet in July 2021 outlined the reasons for the development of a new facility as part of the waterfront development. The building needs investment of over £5m with the changing areas and flumes needing over £1m on their own. If we had not taken the opportunity to develop a new exciting facility then would have been a pressure on the MTFP and considered as part of a future budget process.”

Councillor Ted Strike asked the following supplementary question:-

“Why has this serious issue not been brought before Members attention previously? Can the Leader of the Council advise who is to blame for this major failing? Would it be the builders or maintenance issues by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“We inspect our buildings on regular basis and these are the issues that can arise on these type of buildings. The flumes themselves will need replacing as they have a limited lifespan. There is nobody to blame for the situation and this is an opportunity for a new building because of the new waterfront development.”

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

“Following the Government’s disgraceful refusal to grant Billingham a Levelling up grant, will the council be reapplying? What are the Councils plans going forward if it is refused a second time and what are the time scales of the proposed actions?”

The Leader of the Council responded with;-

“I must on this occasion agree that the Government’s decision to refuse to award levelling up funding to Billingham was disgraceful. Of course we welcome the success of the levelling up bid for Stockton South but we must continue to hold the Government to account for the true meaning of levelling up.

I have written to the Secretary of State to express my absolute disappointment in the Stockton North decision and have requested detailed feedback as to why our very strong case for Billingham was ignored. Officers are awaiting when this feedback will take place.

I can confirm that the Council will be applying for the next round of levelling up and work is already underway to ensure we are ready to meet the Government’s timescales which we expect to be around the Spring of next year.

We will ensure that we use all the tools and knowledge we have to ensure that Billingham has a rock solid case for investment that the Government can simply not ignore and we will not give up trying until the people of Stockton North are

heard.”

Councillor Ted Strike asked the following supplementary question:-

“Will Cabinet bring forward a fully costed plan for the purchase and demolition and reconstruction of the town centre? And will this Council learn from previous mistakes around costings for the Globe?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“A detailed plan will be brought before Cabinet and this will be shared with Billingham Councillors. Officers are working on a new bid to the Levelling Up Fund but at the moment we still don’t know how much money we will have for the town centre.”

C 47/21 Forward Plan and Leader’s Statement

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

Council last met on the 22 September. Since then Cabinet met on the 14 October and then on 18 November 2021 when it considered the following matters:

- The new Council Tax Reduction scheme considered here this evening
- A report on the Strategic Framework for Reducing Inequalities in the Borough
- The mid-year update on the 2021-24 Council Plan
- The 2021 childcare sufficiency assessment
- The 2021 School Organisation Plan
- The Adults Social Care Strategy
- The Armed Forces Covenant annual update
- A report from the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee – on their Scrutiny Review of Multi-Agency Support to Care Homes during the COVID-19 Pandemic
- The Inclusive Growth Strategy
- A report on the annual procurement plan and higher value contracts

Cabinet would next meets on 9 December 2021 and then the 20 January 2022 to consider:

- The 2022 events plan and Memorial Lighting Scheme
- An update from the Bright Minds Big Futures Big Committee
- The 6 month Medium Term Financial Plan update
- A report on the Spark of Genius Joint Venture progress and next steps
- The Annual Report of the Governing Body for the Learning and Skills Service
- A report on the Boundary Commission Ward Boundary Review
- A report on the School Admissions process
- The Customer Service Excellence annual review
- The 2021 review of the Gambling Act 2005 Statement of Principles
- The findings from the Scrutiny Reviews of:
 - o the Disability Inclusive Borough
 - o Police Communications in Stockton-on-Tees

and

- o Highways Asset Management (inc. Potholes & Flooding)
- The Environmental Sustainability and Carbon Reduction Strategy
- A report on the Tees Valley Waste Project

After that the Leader of the Council looked forward to seeing everyone at the next meeting on the 26 January 2022. Until then the Leader of the Council hoped that everyone stayed safe and well and enjoy the Stockton Sparkles event and the packed programme of festive events that were taking place across the Borough.