

Council

A meeting of Council was held on Wednesday, 25th January, 2023.

Present: The Worshipful the Mayor (Cllr Ross Patterson), 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 Lynn Hall, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Mohammed Javed, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Paul Kirton, Cllr Tina Large, Cllr Steve Matthews JP, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr David Minchella, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell, Cllr Maurice Perry, Cllr Lauriane Povey, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Tony Riordan, 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 Steve Walmsley, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Alan Watson, Cllr Sally Ann Watson, Cllr Paul Weston, Cllr Bill Woodhead MBE and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

Officers: Mike Greene (CE), Ged Morton, Julie Butcher, Peter Bell, John Devine, Michael Henderson (CS), Garry Cummings (F,D&R&DCE), Martin Gray (ChS), Reuben Kench (CS,E&C), Ann Workman (A&H).

Also in attendance: Members of the public.

Apologies: Cllr Dan Fagan, Cllr Luke Frost, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Andrew Sherris and Cllr Julia Whitehill.

C 63/22 Welcome

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

C 64/22 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Lynn Hall declared a non-registrable interest in respect of agenda item 7 – Motion to Council as she fell into the age range that could gain financially from the motion. Cllr Lynn Hall withdrew from the meeting during consideration of the item.

C 65/22 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2022.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 23 November 2022 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

C 66/22 Association of Electoral Administrators - Presentation

The Worship the Mayor reported that Margaret Waggott would be presented with an award later this month for her services to the Association of Electoral Administrators.

C 67/22 Public Question Time

The Head of Legal Services reported that there were no Public Questions.

C 68/22 Motion

The following motion had been submitted in accordance with Council Procedure

Rule 3.40 by Cllr Barry Woodhouse, seconded by Cllr Ann McCoy:-

“Fair Compensation for WASPI Women

- In the 1995 Pensions Act, the Government increased State Pension age for women from 60 to 65, with a further increase to 66 in the 2011 Pensions Act.
- The change was not properly communicated to 3.8m women born in the 1950s until 2012, giving some only one year’s notice of a six-year increase in their anticipated retirement age. Many of the affected women are in our own authority area and a total of 65,000 in the North-East. Source: Copy of CBP-07405 Constituency Estimates, House of Commons Library.
- The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) has found that the Department for Work and Pensions was guilty of maladministration in its handling of the State Pension Age increase for women born in the 1950s.
- The All-Party Parliamentary Group on State Pension Inequality for Women has concluded that “the impact of DWP maladministration on 1950s-born women has been as devastating as it is widespread. The APPG believes that the case for category 6 injustice is overwhelming and clear. Women have had their emotional, physical, and mental circumstances totally obliterated by a lack of reasonable notice.”
- Research commissioned by campaign group WASPI has found that by the end of 2022, more than 220,000 1950s born women will have died waiting for justice since the WASPI campaign began in 2015.
- WASPI’s figures show that over the course of the two-year COVID pandemic, 1 in 10 women who died was affected by these uncommunicated changes and lost both their state pension income and the opportunity to make alternative retirement plans.
- Despite the Ombudsman’s findings and the rapid death rate of those affected, the government is choosing to wait for further reports before taking any action.

Council believes this injustice has not only had a profound effect on the individuals involved but on the wider community in Stockton and on local government, not least because:

- Women who would have looked after older relatives or partners are unable to afford to do so, with a knock-on impact on local social care
- Women who would have retired and engaged in caring responsibilities for grandchildren are having to continue working, increasing the childcare burden on the state locally
- Women who have been left in poverty are struggling to meet their housing costs, with a knock-on impact on local housing stock
- There is a broader impact on voluntary services of all kinds locally, which are missing out on able, active volunteers who would otherwise have been able to retire from full-time work as planned
- Our local economy is negatively affected by the reduced spending power and disposable income the uncommunicated State Pension Age changes has brought about among women born in the 1950s

Council supports:

- The conclusion of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on State Pension Inequality that women born in the 1950s have suffered a gross injustice, affecting their emotional, physical and mental circumstances in addition to

causing financial hardship.

- A swift resolution to this ongoing injustice before more and more women die waiting for compensation.
- The WASPI campaign asks for an immediate one-off compensation payment of between £11,666 and £20,000 to those affected, with the most going to women who were given the shortest notice of the longest increase in their state pension age.

Council asks:

- The Leader of the Council to write to local Members of Parliament, and to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to outline the effects of the injustice to 1950s women on the communities in Stockton Borough and to seek their support for an immediate compensation package.”

Moved by Councillor Tony Riordan, seconded by Councillor Niall Innes that the substantive motion be amended as follows:-

“Amend first bullet point, page 2 of 28, to read:-

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) has found that the Department for Works and Pensions, in 2005, failed to make a reasonable decision about targeting information to the women affected by these changes. The Ombudsman also found that the Department for Works and Pensions in 2006 proposed writing to women individually to tell them about changes to State Pension age, but it failed to act promptly, both issues were determined to be maladministration.

Amend fifth bullet point, page 2 of 28 to read:-

The ombudsman is considering what action they think the Department for Works and Pensions should take to remedy the injustice they have determined. Which is the third and final stage of their investigation. Their provisional views regarding stage three have been shared with complainants, their MP’s and the Department of Works and Pensions, and are awaiting their responses. It is expected that the final views, following stages two and three will be published in early spring.”

Following a debate, a vote took place on the amendment. The amendment was not carried.

No further amendments were moved and following a debate a vote then took place on the substantive motion.

The substantive motion was carried as follows:-

“Fair Compensation for WASPI Women

- In the 1995 Pensions Act, the Government increased State Pension age for women from 60 to 65, with a further increase to 66 in the 2011 Pensions Act.
- The change was not properly communicated to 3.8m women born in the 1950s until 2012, giving some only one year’s notice of a six-year increase in their anticipated retirement age. Many of the affected women are in our own authority area and a total of 65,000 in the North-East. Source: Copy of

CBP-07405 Constituency Estimates, House of Commons Library.

- The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) has found that the Department for Work and Pensions was guilty of maladministration in its handling of the State Pension Age increase for women born in the 1950s.
- The All-Party Parliamentary Group on State Pension Inequality for Women has concluded that “the impact of DWP maladministration on 1950s-born women has been as devastating as it is widespread. The APPG believes that the case for category 6 injustice is overwhelming and clear. Women have had their emotional, physical, and mental circumstances totally obliterated by a lack of reasonable notice.”
- Research commissioned by campaign group WASPI has found that by the end of 2022, more than 220,000 1950s born women will have died waiting for justice since the WASPI campaign began in 2015.
- WASPI’s figures show that over the course of the two-year COVID pandemic, 1 in 10 women who died was affected by these uncommunicated changes and lost both their state pension income and the opportunity to make alternative retirement plans.
- Despite the Ombudsman’s findings and the rapid death rate of those affected, the government is choosing to wait for further reports before taking any action.

Council believes this injustice has not only had a profound effect on the individuals involved but on the wider community in Stockton and on local government, not least because:

- Women who would have looked after older relatives or partners are unable to afford to do so, with a knock-on impact on local social care
- Women who would have retired and engaged in caring responsibilities for grandchildren are having to continue working, increasing the childcare burden on the state locally
- Women who have been left in poverty are struggling to meet their housing costs, with a knock-on impact on local housing stock
- There is a broader impact on voluntary services of all kinds locally, which are missing out on able, active volunteers who would otherwise have been able to retire from full-time work as planned
- Our local economy is negatively affected by the reduced spending power and disposable income the uncommunicated State Pension Age changes has brought about among women born in the 1950s

Council supports:

- The conclusion of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on State Pension Inequality that women born in the 1950s have suffered a gross injustice, affecting their emotional, physical and mental circumstances in addition to causing financial hardship.
- A swift resolution to this ongoing injustice before more and more women die waiting for compensation.
- The WASPI campaign asks for an immediate one-off compensation payment of between £11,666 and £20,000 to those affected, with the most going to women who were given the shortest notice of the longest increase in their state pension age.

Council asks:

- The Leader of the Council to write to local Members of Parliament, and

to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to outline the effects of the injustice to 1950s women on the communities in Stockton Borough and to seek their support for an immediate compensation package.”

C
69/22 **Members' Question Time**

The following question had been submitted by Councillor Steve Matthews for response by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing:-

“Now that plan for the redevelopment of Stockton High Street has got underway, what are the final financial costs for the purchase of the Castlegate Centre, the relocation of the businesses to other locations within the Town Centre and elsewhere, any incentives financial or otherwise to these business's, the demolition, the staffing and legal costs. If you could kindly break down the financial details in your response?”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

“Currently 31 businesses have been successfully relocated from Castlegate Centre into Wellington Square and other units on the High Street. The total cost for the acquiring the Castlegate Centre in 2018 amounts to £14.76m (£13.8m acquisition and £966k in stamp duty and fees). At the time the Council acquired the Castlegate, Stockton had a vacancy rate more than twice the national average and I'm very pleased to say that following our initiative today the vacancy rate in the primary retail area is just over 10%, a figure that is now under the national average, with footfall in Wellington Square up 20% year on year in comparison with 2019.

The value of the demolition contract is £4.95million in line with forecast overall delivery costs reported to Cabinet in February 2021.

Cllr Steve Matthews asked the following supplementary question:-

“Thank you for your response. Setting that project and amount of money aside, how much money has the Council spent on each of the other re-development projects on Stockton High Street in the last 10 years? And how much more money will be spent on further re-developing the High Street and the Castlegate site in the next 5 years?”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

“This journey of regenerating our town centres and in-particular Stockton High Street actually pre-dates me as a Councillor, it has been quite a long journey since we started the initial works back in 2011 and I apologise Mr Mayor the question I was asked tonight was specifically around Castlegate so I haven't got those further answers around the first stages of investment although they are published in previous Cabinet decisions which are available to all Members.

Can I just say the cost of compensation to individual re-locations does remain commercial sensitive for understandable reasons. However, I can report all the costs including legal fees associated with the re-location of tenants will be met within that £7 million envelope that was approved by Cabinet in February 2020 and July 2021. And can I say that just generally on this point under our

leadership this authority will continue to invest with or without government support in our town centres.

As Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing its always great to hear from town centre stakeholders both here and far who are keen to learn from this authority's approach to town centre investment and on our watch we refuse to lay down and merely manage decline, we will do all we can to ensure that our town centres survive as places to shop, live, work and enjoy."

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

"We have been informed that the 'former' Managing Director will now be leaving the authority in February as opposed to May. Since our new Managing Director was established in post in November, can the Leader of the Council inform us what roles and responsibilities the former Managing Director has been undertaking within the authority?"

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

"As members will know, we have a long history of managing smooth transition and change in our structures. We diligently built in a transition period that would enable the former head of paid service to hand over responsibilities to the new head of paid service. Whilst that period could have stretched to May, given the pace at which our new Chief Executive has been able to get fully up to speed with the Council the transition period has been shortened to the end of February.

During the period of transition in lead up to the May elections, the outgoing Managing Director has continued to act as the Council's Returning Officer. As members will be aware, there are major changes we've got to implement in time for this year's elections, such as new ward boundaries and the introduction of voter ID laws, so having that additional senior capacity so that is properly supported has proved to be the right decision.

We are a complex organisation, faced with new financial challenges and demands on our services. Done properly transition for our most senior officer post, handing on responsibility for our services is something that has to be planned, carefully thought through and properly resourced."

Councillor Niall Innes asked the following supplementary question:-

"It is difficult to imagine what the former Managing Director has been doing given that the current Chief Executive is extremely experienced. In most organisations the handover is 4 to 6 weeks rather than 4 to 6 months. So, I would like to ask the Leader of the Council what are the cost implications to the Council for maintaining two Managing Directors? How many holidays have been taken by the former Managing Director? And whether he believes that this represents good value for money for the rate payers of Stockton Council?"

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“I haven’t got the figures with me but I’m sure the figures could become available. The former Managing Director is still an employee of this Council. When we brought a report on the review of the senior management structure to Cabinet and to Council reference was always made to the transition period because of the local elections this year we weren’t sure whether we would get an experienced Chief Executive who was a Returning Officer. Some Councils the Chief Executive isn’t the Returning Officer. I’m sure your Group would be the first to complain if anything had gone wrong in May 2023 with the local elections.

The former Managing Director has done a valuable job in the transition period. We did review the situation and she is now leaving at the end of February 2023 because as you have said the new Chief Executive has taken on the responsibilities as at his former job at Scarborough Council, he was the Returning Officer. No comments were made about how long the transition period was when the report came to Cabinet and Council which you could have done at the time. I’m quite surprised that these comments have come so late, I’m not sure whether this is you are just using this for political point scoring.”

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

“This month, January 2023, The Globe Theatre are not putting on any shows. In fact, no shows have been advertised between 22nd December last year, and next month, the 7th of February, a gap of 45 days. The local taxpayer was told by this Council, ‘Stockton Globe will pull in visitors from far and wide and generate millions of pounds of additional spending in the local economy’. The next show, Six, The Musical, as part of a national tour, are also playing shows in the region at Newcastle, Leeds and York, attracting audiences from the same regional catchment area. Do you think this a good return for the vast amount of money that is gifted to the company, by this council, each year, for promoting and attracting acts to the venue, and are we really going to see the promised £18 million boost to the local economy if no shows are taking place?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

““The Globe programme is primarily focused on premium one night Comedy and Music as well as family community programming. The emphasis is on high quality and high-profile performances with a wider audience reach, rather than on a larger number of performances for smaller audiences. On that basis, it is not unusual for venues such as The Globe to have a period of dark days. However, over the Christmas period, the Link hosted a number of community events, choirs, open mic nights as well as operating the Link café.

The Globe has had some significant success with sell out events since opening in September 2021. The last 3 months of 2022 have bought national and internationally renowned artistes to Stockton, including Morrissey, The Proclaimers, RuPaul’s Drag Race, Jools Holland, Paul Heaton, Jimmy Carr, Darren Brown, and Fontaine’s D.C.

'Six' is a very popular premium weeklong theatrical show, which has played in the West End, and we were delighted that The Globe was secured for this tour and to provide the local community the option of seeing this on their doorstep. However, it did again attract customers from all over the country and outside the region, despite it running in Newcastle, York and Leeds. According to the Globe operators, Ambassador Theatre Group (ATG), Six has sold extremely well and ahead of previous sales seen within ATG venues, demonstrating that there is an appetite as well as a significant catchment in the region."

Councillor Tony Riordan asked the following supplementary question:-

"The taxpayers of this Borough have been left with a hefty £1.65 million to support the Ambassador Theatre Group for the development and to attract artists during years 1 to 5. The bill for last year was £33,333 per month or when you take into account when there are 45 days of no shows it has cost the taxpayer just over £40,000 per month. No shows means that no money comes into the local economy. It has also been established that the promised figure of £18 million been generated annually for the local economy was flawed from the beginning. Will the Leader of the Council accept that this Labour led deal to throw vast amounts of tax-payers money at this vanity project has failed and will he take responsibility?"

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

"I do think this project is value for money. The venue has only been open for just over one year. A venue such as the Globe has to ensure that the promoters and the producers of the show get to know about the Globe. A lot of venues were closed for quite a while and therefore obviously the touring shows just disappeared, but they are starting to come back now and I'm sure that as we move forward there will be more shows at the Globe.

We had a derelict building that has been brought back into use, people are employed there, and we are getting business rates from the building, this would never have happened if we hadn't invested money into the Globe. This was all about the regeneration of the town centre of Stockton and ensuring the night-time economy could flourish. We are seeing a lot more people using the businesses around the Globe. This economic development wouldn't happen overnight, and we have to work at this and make sure that the producers and promoters get to know about the Globe. ATG operate venues around the world including New York, Australia and the West End London. We will become the best venue in the North-East, why shouldn't we have a venue in Stockton, there are venues in Newcastle, Leeds and York, why should residents have to travel to see good entertainment. We have brought this venue to the Tees Valley, I believe the venue is a success and will continue to be even more successful."

The Worshipful the Mayor reported that as Councillor Stefan Houghton had received a satisfactory response to his question to the Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture he had withdrawn his question.

C 70/22 Forward Plan and Leader's Statement

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

Council last met on the 23 November 2023. Since then, Cabinet met on the 19 January 2023 and considered the following matters:

- A report on the annual procurement plan and higher value contracts
- The Domestic Abuse Strategy 2022-2028
- The 2022 Event Summary and 2023 Memorial Lighting Calendar
- A report on the Stockton Shared Lives Scheme
- The findings from the Scrutiny Review of Care at Home
- A report on the Educational Attainment for Vulnerable Pupils 2022
- A report on the School Admissions process
- The Playing Pitch Strategy & Outdoor Sport Strategy 2022 - 2025

Cabinet would next meet on the 13 February 2023 to consider the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

Following that Cabinet would meet again on 23 February 2023 to consider:-

- An update on BMBF
- The Council Plan 2023-26
- Flexible Working Update and Policy
- Scrutiny Reviews of
 - o Home Energy Efficiency and Green Jobs for the Future
 - o Contextual Safeguarding and Youth Relationships
 - o Planning (Development Management) & Adoption of Open Space
 - o Review of Tree Asset Management
- Independent Safety Advisory Group (ISAG) Overview Report for 2022/23 Event
- Public Space Protection Order

The Leader of the Council looked forward to seeing Members again and I hoped that they all stayed safe and well.