

COUNCIL

A meeting of Council was held on Wednesday 21 June 2023.

Present: The Worshipful the Mayor (Cllr Jim Beall), Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Dan Fagan, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Clare Gamble, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Laura Tunney, Cllr Hilary Vickers, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Alan Watson, Cllr Sally Ann Watson, Cllr Paul Weston, Cllr Paul Rowling, Cllr Susan Scott, Cllr Vanessa Sewell, Cllr Emily Tate, Cllr Jim Taylor, Cllr Marcus Vickers, Cllr Katie Weston, Cllr Stefan Barnes, Cllr Michelle Bendelow, Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Diane Clarke OBE, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Nathan Gale, Cllr Alex Griffiths, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Shakeel Hussain and Cllr Sufi Mubeen.

Officers: .

Also in attendance: Members of the Public.

Apologies: Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Tony Riordan and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

COU/27 Welcome and Evacuation Procedure

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

COU/28 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

COU/29 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meetings held on 22 March 2023 and 24 May 2023.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 22 March 2023 and 24 May 2023 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

COU/30 Warm Homes Healthy People

The Worshipful the Mayor informed the meeting that Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's Warm Homes Healthy People project had won recognition at the North-East Energy Efficiency Awards.

The project won the Regional Vulnerable Customer Support Organisation of the Year Award for organisations that had shown a true commitment to improving the lives of vulnerable people through energy efficiency in their region.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport, Councillor Clare Gamble reported that last winter the scheme helped hundreds of residents including:

- 177 requests for assistance processed
- 74 boiler repairs actioned by the service
- 66 proactive boiler services actioned which undoubtedly reduced the number of repairs
- 27 individuals referred to the Fire Brigade for emergency heating solutions
- 223 households received support through grants and benefits through income maximization
- 204 clients assisted by Stockton and District Advice and Information Service with the majority seeking advice regarding benefits

For 12 years, the Council's dedicated team had worked hard to help the most vulnerable households stay warm in the winter months.

The award was testament to the compassion and commitment of Council staff, working tirelessly to help those residents who were struggling with their heating payments or their domestic heating systems.

Warm Homes Healthy People runs from October to March each year and offers a range of support to the most vulnerable in our community.

Neil Mitchell and Lee Tweddle from Environment, Leisure & Green Infrastructure were in attendance at the meeting and were re-presented with the award.

COU/31 Public Question Time

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

COU/32 Appointment of the Deputy Mayor of the Borough for the Municipal Year 2023/24

Moved by Councillor David Reynard, seconded by Councillor Marcus Vickers, that Councillor John Gardner be appointed Deputy Mayor for the Municipal Year 2023/24.

RESOLVED that Councillor John Gardner be appointed Deputy Mayor for the Municipal Year 2023/24.

COU/33 Appointments/Amendments to Committees and Panel for 2023/27

At its Annual Meeting, held on Wednesday 24 May 2023, the Council approved appointments to its Committees, Panels and Joint/Outside Bodies for 2023/27.

An attachment to the report highlighted vacancies and the nominations that had been received.

RESOLVED that the below appointments be made:-

ANEC Leaders' and Elected Mayors Group Designated substitute for Leader of the Council - Deputy Leader of the Council

Teesside International Airport Consultative Committee - Councillor David Reynard
Hartlepool Power Station Community Liaison Committee - Councillor Michelle Bendelow

North-East Regional Employers' Organisation - Councillor Marcus Vickers

Standing Advisory Council of Religious Education - Councillor Susan Scott

COU/34 Members' Question Time

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

"Following the major error by the boundary commission when they put through the boundary changes on Ingleby Barwick resulting in the town council representation being reduced from 12 to 6. This was despite the error being highlighted immediately and notified that it had been rectified. The town clerk has written to the boundary commission and SBC asking for a "Community Governance Review".

Whilst the town council wishes to be at full complement as soon as possible it recognises that this will be a long and costly exercise it is hoped that the boundary commission is open to cover the costs due to their error. It is also recognised that there are other elections due to be held on May 2nd 2024 so would be willing to agree to the full town council election being held on this date to reduce cost and also maximise elector turnout as well as the workload of SBC staff.

Will this council be supporting our campaign to get this error corrected next year otherwise we will have to operate with just 6 councillors for four years through no fault of the town council?"

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

"It is a disappointing that the Boundary Commission did get this wrong. Ingleby Barwick is a large community and 6 Councillors for the Town Council is very low.

Officers have made contact with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to discuss with them the options for remedying their error, what action the LGBCE will be taking and how any costs that may be incurred by Stockton Council will be funded. The LGBCE has the power to lay an Order rectifying the error and returning the number of Town Councillors back to 12.

Once that error has been corrected then the Council can consider conducting a Community Governance Review. The CGR would consult on reducing the term of office of the 6 current town councillors which, if agreed, would then allow a new election to be held to return the Town Council to 12 councillors.

As noted this is a lengthy process and is subject to the LGBCE taking steps to remedy their error. The decision as to whether to commence a Community Governance

Review is a decision of the full Council here at Stockton and once the LGBCE confirm their approach a report can be brought for consideration.

The Town Council is responsible for the costs of their elections and I would encourage them to discuss with the LGBCE how those costs will be reimbursed should it be necessary to hold a further election before the expiry of the term of office of the recently elected 6 town councillors.

Councillor Ted Strike asked the following supplementary question:-

“Can SBC keep the Ingleby Barwick Town Council clerk fully informed of the process please?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“Yes, we will keep the Town Clerk and all the Councillors of Ingleby Barwick fully informed.”

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

“Following the embarrassing notice in the gazette regarding the Council owned Hampton by Hilton Hotel having received a "Strike Off "notice and threatened to be dissolved within two months.

A report in the gazette quoted a council spokesperson which said "Delays in filing the hotel accounts and auditing council accounts were down to technical accounting issues outside our control”.

Since SBC fully own the hotel, which is a registered Limited Company, why are filing accounts outside of the council's control?

Who is in control of ensuring these accounts are filed on time?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“Members have been provided with a written answer outlining the reasons for the delay. I am now happy to confirm that proposed strike off action by Companies House has been discontinued following representation by the Board of Directors. The question within your question and as part of the response by the Director of Finance it was the Teesside Pension Fund who needed to finalise their accounts before the Council could close their accounts as the accounts are done as a group of Tees Valley Borough accounts except for Darlington Borough Council. This is why the issue was outside of our control.”

Councillor Ted Strike asked the following supplementary question:-

“I did get the response as did all Members and I have emailed Councillor Cook and I have asked if Council could have a debate about the Hotel and I think with what has gone on in the press it would be very prudent to have a debate on the subject?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“I don’t think it is within my power to say what is on the agenda of future Council meetings. I have suggested that with regard to the situation with Teesside Pension Fund that the Board of Directors for the Hotel appoint auditors themselves for the Hotel and therefore their accounts would not be part of the group of accounts. ”

At this point the Mayor reminded Council that, within the rules of the Constitution, motions can be brought for debate and resolution.

The following question was submitted by Councillor Marcus Vickers:-

“With over 20 potholes in a distance of approximately 30 metres or less, when will Whitehouse Road in Billingham be resurfaced?”

The Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport responded with:-

“I can confirm that a scheduled highway inspection was undertaken in May on Whitehouse Road and a number of actionable defects were identified, marked up and have now been repaired.

In addition, within the 2023/24 highway maintenance programme there are structural patching schemes scheduled on sections of Whitehouse Road and Sandy Lane, to repair those areas in most need of attention.

A Vehicle Activated Speed Warning Sign is also being implemented on Whitehouse Road as part of a Ward Transport Budget scheme.

I would also like to take this opportunity to point out that there is a reporting process for reporting potholes and requests like this. You can direct your questions to officers and then you wouldn’t have to wait until a meeting of Council to get an answer to your question.”

Councillor Marcus Vickers asked the following supplementary question:-

“We know it is only Conservative councils that get people’s priorities done, get value for money and that get potholes done. When will this Labour and Independent run Council finally put the priorities of the people of Billingham, Wolviston, Cowpen Bewley and the Clarences first and not vanity projects centred on Stockton High Street?”

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport responded with:-

“I’m hugely passionate about ensuring that the priorities for the people of Billingham are met and I look forward to fellow Cabinet Members sharing information about future plans as they become available.”

The following question was submitted by Councillor David Reynard:-

“What will Stockton council do to make residents in Wolviston village safer from the dangers of reckless drivers and speeding drivers through their village?”

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

“The issue of drivers speeding or driving recklessly is a matter for the police, as they are responsible for the enforcement of speed limits and dangerous driving, this issue will be raised with Cleveland Police Force for them to decide what action they deem is necessary.

However, the Borough Council do take road safety very seriously and as such I would like to reassure residents in Wolviston village that through analysis of the current road safety data I can confirm that there has not been any recorded crashes that have resulted in personal injury in the last three years.

The road safety record at this location is very good compared to other locations in the Borough and as such, the existing evidence does not justify any further engineering measures at this location. This is not to say that the issue raised is not important just that our core road safety funding needs to be targeted elsewhere.

The Council will, of course, continue to monitor the safety record in this area. Locations where there are community concerns that are not a priority for Council’s core road safety funding are eligible for investigation through the Ward Transport Budget where the Ward Councillors prioritise which issues are taken forward for investigation. It is my understanding that local Ward Councillors have been informed of local concerns and a speed check date has been set with Cleveland Police.”

The following question was submitted by Councillor Marcus Vickers:-

“Can the Leader reassure members and residents of this Borough that the promised dividend of £250k per annum will be topping up the Council coffers now we are through the pandemic, and the Hotel Company is being ran in accordance with The Companies Act 2006?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“The hotel’s draft accounts for 2021-22 show a profit of £130,000 with £90,000 business rates to the council, and the similar amount is expected for 2022-23 accounts.

The only issue in relation to the operation of the company with regard to legislation is the delay to the accounts and members have received information with regards to the reasons.”

Councillor Marcus Vickers asked the following supplementary question:-

“You have quoted £130k profit and £90k in business rates paid to the Council for 2021/22, when these were quoted does it take into account the £465k handed over by the Council to the Hotel in February last year to write off the losses of the £215k and the additional £250k given to the hotel in 2021/21, also the business rate paid by the hotel for the year you quoted was actually £22k due to the government reducing business rates across the town sector, therefore I have to ask are you making these figures up as you go along or are these figures contained within the draft accounts that only you and a select few are able to view?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“Obviously everyone will be able to view the accounts once they aren’t in draft form and when they have been signed off. You mentioned that there was a scheme for business rates so we still got £90k whether it was from the government or from the hotel.

As well as employing local people, both directly and through the jobs it generates in the supply chain, it has quickly become one of the most popular hotels in the area, filling the gap in the market especially for the business community.

Midweek occupancy for the year to date from January to end May was 95%, and the total overall occupancy is 74% for combined weekends and midweek. The figures are higher than a lot of other hotels.

The pandemic had a negative effect on the hotel, as it did for all other similar businesses, however the performance of the hotel is now doing particularly well.

The hotel company will recommend a dividend from the profits - We expect to contribute approximately £250k per annum to the Council due to profits, business rates and other income from the hotel.

This is one of the best hotels within the north-east region outside of a city area. It has come on a lot since it opened and some of the nights in January it was 100% full. We are benefitting from the companies that use the ‘Hilton’ brand as a town and as a Council. Even events in Middlesbrough and other parts of the Tees Valley, the crew and everyone else are staying at the Hilton because it is a global brand. Lots of companies are signed up to the Hilton Honours system and they will use whichever Hilton is within a 20-mile radius. In fact the Leader of the Conservatives when he was Chancellor even though he had an appointment in Darlington chose to stay at the Hilton in Stockton. If the Prime Minister can recognise the Hilton as a good hotel surely the local conservative party can stop talking down the hotel and get behind the hotel.”

COU/35 Forward Plan and Leader’s Statement

Council last met on 25 May 2023 at the Annual Meeting. Since then Cabinet had met on the 15 June and agreed the following matters:

- An update on the 2022-25 Council Plan.
- Appointments to outside bodies
- School Term and Holiday Dates - 2024/2025
- Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Outcomes and Action Plan

Cabinet would next meet on 13 July and consider reports on:

- Feedback on the recent elections
- Update on the Indigenous Growth Fund
- Medium Term Financial Plan – Draft Outturn March 2023
- Modern Slavery Statement
- Powering Our Future
- Senior Management Capacity
- Ombudsman Public Interest Report
- Xentrall Annual Report 2022/23

- Town Centre Regeneration
- Employee Volunteering

To mark the start of armed forces week there was the flag raising ceremony at Municipal Buildings, led by the Mayor. Armed forces day itself would be on 22 June. Armed Forces Day was a great opportunity for the people of the Borough to honour all the brave men and women serving the country. There would be activities on the High Street from 9.30am to 3.00pm with wartime musical performances from professionals and schools, military vehicle displays, exhibitions and demonstrations.

After that the Leader of the Council looked forward to seeing Members at the next Council meeting on the 26 July.