

COUNCIL

A meeting of Council was held on Wednesday 24 July 2024.

Present: The Worshipful the Mayor (), Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Stefan Barnes, Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Michelle Bendelow, Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Diane Clarke OBE, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Nathan Gale, Cllr Clare Besford, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Paul Rowling, Cllr Susan Scott, Cllr Vanessa Sewell, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Laura Tunney, Cllr Jim Taylor, Cllr Hilary Vickers, Cllr Marcus Vickers, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Paul Weston, Cllr Katie Weston and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

Officers: Garry Cummings, Reuben Kench, Carolyn Nice, Peter Bell, Julie Butcher and Judy Trainer.

Also in attendance: Members of the Public.

Apologies: Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Dan Fagan, Cllr Alex Griffiths, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Emily Tate, Cllr Alan Watson and Cllr Sally Ann Watson.

COU/127/24 Welcome and Evacuation Procedure

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

COU/128/24 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

COU/129/24 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meetings held on 29 May 2024.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 May 2024 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

COU/130/24 Public Question Time

Public Question submitted by Patricia McHale for response by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing (Cllr Nigel Cooke):-

“Why have you chosen to provide housing with the levelling up money for Billingham. This was not our priority in consultation?”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

“The masterplan for Billingham town centre sets out a mixed-use approach to redevelopment. The redevelopment scheme combines improvements to public realm, new retail floorspace and the redevelopment and reuse of vacant office floorspace along with the delivery of a residential development. In developing proposals for the centre, the findings from consultation is one element of a broader set of considerations and competing priorities that must be balanced up, including market conditions, local need and the change of ownership of the centre.

In the current circumstances there are a limited number of realistic redevelopment options for the West Precinct site. Demand for affordable housing to support residents requiring both general needs housing and specialist housing is increasing across all areas of our borough, so the inclusion of residential development as part of a broader package of interventions to revitalise the town centre was the most effective and deliverable solution for the centre as well as contributing to wider housing need in the Borough.”

Patricia McHale asked the following supplementary question:-

“With 160 extra houses has consideration been given to the impact this will have on GP services, dental services, schools, parking and social care?”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

“It is generally accepted that successful town centres going forward are mixed use. Residential, retail, leisure, workplace are all important. The existing town centre has residential space already in it but the space is unfit for occupation so these are the challenges that we need to consider. Any proposal around housing will be subject to the usual planning processes and during those processes the public will have the opportunity to comment on the proposals.”

Public Question submitted by Patricia McHale for response by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing (Cllr Nigel Cooke):-

“Is the planned housing for the west precinct social or private?”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

“The Council will seek a partner to support delivery for the residential element of the scheme. The specific residential product on the site is as yet undefined and will be influenced by market demand, developer/housing association interest and site viability along with broader considerations in regard to housing need in the Borough. It is anticipated that the site will deliver a range of housing tenures.”

Public Question submitted by Liam McHale for response by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing (Cllr Nigel Cooke):-

“The levelling up money for Billingham, the 2019 survey confirmed residents prioritise building houses extremely low, what alternatives to housing are counsellors proposing for the money?”

Response from the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing (by way of written response in the absence of Liam McHale):-

“The masterplan for Billingham town centre sets out a mixed use approach to redevelopment. The redevelopment scheme combines improvements to public realm, new retail floorspace and the redevelopment and reuse of vacant office floorspace along with the delivery of a residential development.

Alternative options uses for the West Precinct site were considered through the masterplan process but In the current market there are a limited number of realistic redevelopment options for the West Precinct site from a viability and market demand perspective along with consideration of uses that would compete with existing uses in the centre and that may have deterred the current owners from selling the site for a development.”

Public Question submitted by Liam McHale for response by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing (Cllr Nigel Cooke):-

How can the public engage with the Council to register disagreement with building more homes as well as discussing plausible alternatives like initiatives to help local small businesses access units?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing (by way of written response in the absence of Liam McHale):-

“A period of engagement with the public, business and stakeholders is planned for early Autumn. Suggestions can be made through that process or regeneration and business support teams can be contacted directly in regard to specific developments or initiatives such as support for new or small businesses in specific areas. Furthermore, the opportunity to object formerly through the planning process also exists at the point a planning application is submitted.”

Public Question submitted by Guy Snead for response by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport (Cllr Clare Besford):-

“Can I have an explanation of the downsides of having Parking Contravention Notices (PCN’s) issued from public submitted evidence?”

Response from the Cabinet Member Environment and Transport (by way of written response in the absence of Guy Snead:-

Issuing Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) as a result of evidence provided by members of the public is a course of action that has been considered several times in recent years as part of our commitment maintaining our enforcement policies and practices under consistent review to ensure the best service delivery to the our community.

This approach was considered recently, but ultimately deemed to be unsuitable for Stockton on Tees Borough Council due to a number of concerns outlined below:

1. There is an increased risk of confrontation.

- There are concerns for public safety; encouraging the public to gather evidence could lead to direct confrontations between the members of the public and drivers. An individual being photographed or recorded may react aggressively, potentially leading to physical altercations and harm. This situation is often encountered by officers enforcing parking regulations nationally. We do not want the public putting themselves in this position unnecessarily, especially without appropriate training or equipment to protect them.

- The approach may lead to vigilantism and inappropriate use; It was felt it could engender a sense of vigilantism whereby certain members of the public could feel empowered to enforce the law themselves, in turn escalating conflicts and leading to chaotic situations. There are concerns also that this approach could promote the targeting of individuals within a community and may lack proportionality and fairness.

2. Balanced Enforcement and Education

- The approach could mean a lack of professional discretion; Civic Enforcement Officers are trained to handle parking issues with discretion, considering the wider context and potential need for education over punishment. In many instances the parking problems are as a result of influencing factors such as lack of parking provision, and officers will often take broader action to alleviate parking issues in the longer term as opposed to a short term enforcement action.

- Public Confidence: Our Civic Enforcement Officers aim to maintain a positive relationship with the community they work for. Over-reliance on punitive measures, especially through public involvement, can damage public trust and reduce the willingness of communities to cooperate with the local authority.

3. Resource Demands

- There are the requirements of validation and processing to consider: Validating evidence provided by the public requires significant resources as seen in locations that have piloted similar approaches. Authorities must verify the legitimacy, context, and accuracy of each report. This can be time-consuming and labour intensive, especially set against a backdrop of reducing resources.

- Implementing and managing an appropriate system and process: Implementing a system to handle, review, and respond to the influx of reports from the public necessitates substantial investment in technology and personnel. This can divert resources from other critical areas of community safety and wider services provided to the residents by the authority.

In summary, we want to continue to work closely with our residents in order to respond to concerns they have regarding parking practices in our borough. Residents can report issues for investigation in more ways than ever before including online or via email. At this time however we are not looking at extending his reporting to include public provided evidence of civil parking offences.

COU/131/24 Motion submitted by Cllr Niall Innes

The following motion had been submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.40, moved by Councillor Niall Innes, seconded by Councillor Tony Riordan:-

"Stockton Council is a Local Authority that pays more £100,000 plus salaries than many others in the country.

On many occasions decisions to recruit senior management have been taken without the consultation or approval of Full Council.

It is therefore proposed that for any New or Replacement Assistant, Intern or Full Director roles must come before full council for approval, with full justification given as to the requirements of this role and salary.

This also applies for any contractors who are put into such positions."

Following a debate, a vote took place and the motion was not carried.

COU/132/24 Enhanced Support for Care Experienced Young People

Council was asked to agree that 'care experience' was recognised as a locally protected characteristic to demonstrate the Council's commitment as a Corporate Parent. This would ensure that the Council's care-experienced young people did not face inequality and that their needs were at the heart of all the Council's decision-making, alongside other groups who formally shared a protected characteristic.

Members were asked to note the report to Cabinet at Appendix 1, this set out a range of measures to support care-experienced young people. The report included a proposal to be considered by the Council for the recognition of 'care experience' as a locally protected characteristic. The rationale for this designation was set out in the Cabinet report.

At this point and in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.65 Councillor Steve Nelson requested that a recorded vote be taken on the proposed recommendations; which was supported by at least a quarter of the members present.

Members in favour of the recommendations:-

Cllr Stefan Barnes, Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Michelle Bendelow, Cllr Clare Besford, Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Nathan Gale, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr Paul Rowling, Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Paul Weston, Cllr Katie Weston and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

Abstentions:-

Cllr Diane Clarke OBE, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Jason French, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Susan Scott, Cllr Vanessa Sewell, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Jim Taylor, Cllr Laura Tunney, Cllr Hilary Vickers and Cllr Marcus Vickers.

The recommendations were carried by 28 votes for and 20 abstentions.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The report to Cabinet identifying a range of measures to support the Council's care-experienced young people be noted.
2. 'Care Experienced' is formally recognised as a locally protected characteristic within the Borough, ensuring that the needs of the Council's care-experienced young people are prioritised in all Council decision-making processes.

COU/133/24 Members' Question Time

There were no Members Questions.

COU/134/24 Forward Plan and Leader's Statement

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

Council last met on 29 May. Since then, Cabinet had convened on the 17 June and again on the 18 July. These meetings considered the following main matters:

- Thornaby Town Deal
- Billingham Town Centre and Sports Hub
- Medium-Term Financial Plan Outturn for March 2024
- Xentrall Annual Report for 2023-24
- Central Stockton & North Thornaby Blueprint
- Enhanced Support for our Care Experienced Young People
- The Anti-Poverty Strategy
- The new Defibrillator Policy

Cabinet will meet again on 12 September, where it is anticipated that the following items will be considered:

- An update on the Medium-Term Financial Plan
- Free School Plans
- The Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Feedback from the Local Government Association
- The Race Equality Charter

Looking ahead, the Leader of the Council was excited about the events and activities planned for the Summer within the Borough. The Stockton International Riverside Festival returns to Stockton High Street from Friday 2nd to Sunday 4th August, offering a jam-packed weekend programme. The Community Carnival would also be held on Sunday 4th August. SIRF begins on the 2 August.

After that, the Leader of the Council looked forward to seeing Members at the next Council meeting on 18 September.