

Date: Wednesday 24 July 2024 at 6.00 pm

Venue: Baptist Tabernacle Auditorium, The Square, Stockton on Tees, TS18 1TE

AGENDA

- 1 Welcome and Evacuation Procedure**
- 2 Apologies for Absence**
- 3 Declarations of Interest**
- 4 Minutes**
To approve the minutes of the last meeting held on 29 May 2024 (Pages 7 - 14)
- 5 Public Question Time** (Pages 15 - 18)
- 6 Motion submitted by Cllr Niall Innes** (Pages 19 - 20)
- 7 Enhanced Support for Care Experienced Young People** (Pages 21 - 30)
- 8 Members' Question Time**
- 9 Forward Plan and Leader's Statement**

Members of the Public - Rights to Attend Meeting

With the exception of any item identified above as containing exempt or confidential information under the Local Government Act 1972 Section 100A(4), members of the public are entitled to attend this meeting and/or have access to the agenda papers.

Persons wishing to obtain any further information on this meeting, including the opportunities available for any member of the public to speak at the meeting; or for details of access to the meeting for disabled people, please

Contact: Democratic Services Officer, Peter Bell on email peter.bell@stockton.gov.uk

KEY - Declarable interests are:-

- Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI's)
- Other Registerable Interests (ORI's)
- Non Registerable Interests (NRI's)

Members – Declaration of Interest Guidance



Table 1 - Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Subject	Description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain
Sponsorship	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the council) made to the councillor during the previous 12-month period for expenses incurred by him/her in carrying out his/her duties as a councillor, or towards his/her election expenses. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
Contracts	Any contract made between the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners (or a firm in which such person is a partner, or an incorporated body of which such person is a director* or a body that such person has a beneficial interest in the securities of*) and the council — (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and (b) which has not been fully discharged.
Land and property	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the council. 'Land' excludes an easement, servitude, interest or right in or over land which does not give the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners (alone or jointly with another) a right to occupy or to receive income.
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the council for a month or longer.
Corporate tenancies	Any tenancy where (to the councillor's knowledge)— (a) the landlord is the council; and (b) the tenant is a body that the councillor, or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners is a partner of or a director* of or has a beneficial interest in the securities* of.
Securities	Any beneficial interest in securities* of a body where— (a) that body (to the councillor's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the council; and (b) either— (i) the total nominal value of the securities* exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or (ii) if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the councillor, or his/ her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners have a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.

* 'director' includes a member of the committee of management of an industrial and provident society.

* 'securities' means shares, debentures, debenture stock, loan stock, bonds, units of a collective investment scheme within the meaning of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and other securities of any description, other than money deposited with a building society.

Table 2 – Other Registerable Interest

You must register as an Other Registrable Interest:

- a) any unpaid directorships
- b) any body of which you are a member or are in a position of general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority
- c) any body
 - (i) exercising functions of a public nature
 - (ii) directed to charitable purposes or
 - (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management

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COUNCIL

A meeting of Council was held on Wednesday 29 May 2024.

Present: The Worshipful the Mayor (Cllr John Gardner), Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Michelle Bendelow, Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Richard Eglinton, Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Nathan Gale, Cllr Clare Besford, Cllr Alex Griffiths, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, 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 Emily Tate, Cllr Laura Tunney, Cllr Jim Taylor, Cllr Hilary Vickers, Cllr Marcus Vickers, Cllr Alan Watson, Cllr Sally Ann Watson, Cllr Paul Weston and Cllr Katie Weston.

Officers: Mike Greene (CE), Ged Morton, Julie Butcher, Judy Trainer, Peter Bell, Garry Cummings (DCE&F,T&P), Reuben Kench (DoCS,E&C) and Carolyn Nice (A,H&W).

Also in attendance: Members of the Public.

Apologies: Cllr Stefan Barnes, Cllr Diane Clarke OBE, Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Dan Fagan, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

COU/118/24 Welcome and Evacuation Procedure

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

COU/119/24 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

COU/120/24 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meetings held on 20 March and 3 April 2024.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March and 3 April 2024 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

COU/121/24 Public Question Time

The following question had been submitted by John McDermottroe for response by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing (Cllr Nigel Cooke):-

“Is there a danger the £20M levelling up funding for Billingham Town Centre will be lost if part of it is to be used for housing that was not part of the plan?”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

“Officers are in close liaison with civil servants in the Department for Levelling Up Homes and Communities (DLUHC) in regard to the detailed elements of the Levelling Up Fund award and expenditure items within that programme. There is no suggestion that a residential led redevelopment in Billingham town centre would jeopardise or affect the award of funding throughout conversations and correspondence with DLUHC.”

John McDermottroe asked the following supplementary question:-

“Whenever I ask any questions about the consultation, I’m asked to refer to the consultation from 2020 and I quote from that ‘there is very little desire for housing’ in that consultation so why are you going against the wishes of the people of Billingham?”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

“Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has a strong track record for delivering regeneration schemes across the Borough and I’m delighted we are in a position where we can help and take control to lead the shape of Billingham’s future. In this ambitious plan the oversupply of retail space will be brought into line with demand and the continuation of changes that have been made over recent years to make the town centre the place that people want to visit, to live, to work and to do business. This is very much in-line with the masterplan that has been developed following that conversation a number of years ago.”

The following question had been submitted by Chris Liphthorpe for response by the Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture (Cllr Steve Nelson):-

“The Department for Health and Social Care have opened a consultation ending on 17th June proposing the mass fluoridation of 1.6 million North East people including the residents Stockton-on-Tees. Their reasoning includes that the compulsory medication of our drinking water will reduce the gap in oral health between the most and least deprived regions.

Unlike other public health measures, such as vaccination, where individuals can opt-out, fluoridation allows no such choice. It affects everyone who relies on tap water for drinking, cooking, and daily hygiene. This one-size-fits-all approach disregards individual consent and medical history, where fluoride may not be advised for everyone.

Secondly, the potential health risks include dental fluorosis in children, bone problems, thyroid function, diabetes II. It is a neurotoxin and enzyme disruptor. In light of these concerns, I urge the council to consider the precautionary principle. Let us not introduce a substance into our water supply when there is reasonable doubt about its safety and necessity.

Instead, let us invest in targeted dental health programs that educate and empower individuals to take charge of their dental health without compromising their right to choose what goes into their bodies.”

The Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture responded with:-

“Firstly, I’d like to clarify that the revised Health and Care Act (2022) transferred responsibility for water fluoridation from local authorities to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State now has responsibility for establishing any new water fluoridation schemes, or for varying or terminating existing water fluoridation schemes in England;

The revenue costs of any schemes would also transfer to the Secretary of State. This will allow central government to directly take responsibility for fluoridation schemes.

In response to your concerns regarding water fluoridation I would respond as follows:

Fluoride is a mineral that occurs naturally in water and some foods such as fish and is known to be important for tooth and bone health. The amount naturally found in water varies across the UK for geological reasons. The extraction of decayed teeth is the most common reason for hospital admission of under-18-year-olds in England and is particularly high in Yorkshire and Humber and the North East. Between 2018 and 2021 over 2000 children under 5 were admitted to hospital in the North East for dental caries. Community water fluoridation schemes involve adding fluoride to community drinking water to a level which is known to reduce tooth decay; the schemes also disproportionately benefit those who live in areas of greater deprivation.

Fluoride is already currently added to drinking water in 35 local authorities in the UK. Approximately 700,000 people in the North East have been drinking artificially adjusted water for over 50 years (in Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland (Tyne Valley and Coast) and County Durham (Consett, Stanley, Crook and Lanchester). Naturally fluoridated water occurs in Hartlepool (since 1840) and the East Durham Coast (since 1890). Fluoride levels in drinking water are closely monitored by the Drinking Water Inspectorate. The World Health Organisation recommends a maximum level of 1.5mg/l and the proposed level of fluoridation through the new scheme would be below this at 1mg/l.

Based on academic research, Public Health England estimates that water fluoridation would reduce tooth decay in 5-year-old children living in areas with naturally low fluoride levels by at least 17%. In the most deprived areas, the reduction would be greater with 28%. It is estimated that fluoridation would half hospital admissions for tooth extractions in children.

The water fluoridation health monitoring report (2022) confirmed the protective effect of fluoridated drinking water and that children and young people in the most deprived area benefitted the most.

The Chief Medical Officer states that due to weak and conflicting evidence, there is no significant association between water fluoridation and harm to health. The Public Health England water fluoridation health monitoring reports from 2014, 2018 and 2022 support this (The Office for Health Improvements and Disparity, on behalf of the Sec of State, has a legal duty to monitor the effects of water fluoridation schemes on health and report every 4 years), as well as international evidence. The OHID monitoring reports also keep the scientific literature around potential impacts on wider

health under constant review. Approximately one in 10 people in England currently have fluoride added to their drinking water supplies (OHID health monitoring report, 2022). The 2022 report concluded:

‘This report supports earlier findings and wider evidence that water fluoridation, at levels recommended in the UK, is a safe and effective public health measure to reduce dental caries and inequalities in dental health.’

Locally we have a programme of oral health improvement which supports the population-wide benefits of the proposed community water fluoridation scheme. This includes oral health promotion and education, toothbrushing schemes in our local primary schools and system-wide activity to promote healthy diet with the benefits this brings to oral health.”

Chris Lipthorpe asked the following supplementary question:-

“Should people not be given fully informed consent what goes into their drinking water?”

The Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture responded with:-

“You would need to take that up with central government, I stressed in my original answer that this is the responsibility of central government and the Secretary of State. People are perfectly entitled to their own opinions. Consultation is on-going and I would encourage you to make your submissions to the consultation and include the Health and Wellbeing Board.”

COU/122/24 Appointments/Amendments to Committees, Panel Joint /Outside Bodies for 2023/27

The Council had previously approved appointments to its Committees, Panels and Joint/Outside Bodies for 2023/27.

A request had been received from a political group to amend one of its positions on the Cleveland Police and Crime Panel, as follows:

Remove - Councillor Pauline Beall Add - Councillor Paul Rowling

RESOLVED that the amendment be approved.

COU/123/24 Director of Public Health Annual Report

The Director of Public Health Annual Report 2023/24 was brought to Cabinet for consideration.

Under the Health and Social Care Act (2012), the Director of Public Health has a duty to prepare an independent annual report. The report followed the Director of Public Health report presented in November 2023 which reviewed the public health response to Covid-19 in Stockton-on-Tees.

The Director of Public Health Annual Report 2023/24 highlighted the challenge of persistent health inequalities experienced by people in Stockton-on-Tees. Health

inequalities and poor health and wellbeing had a significant impact on people's lives, were unjust and largely preventable.

The report highlighted existing examples of good practice and strong partnerships with other organisations and the voluntary and community sector but was clear that a holistic and systematic approach was required to go further and faster in addressing inequalities.

The proposed approach with interventions in civic society, community and services based on a self-assessment complements the Council's Powering our Future policy.

With regard to consultation and engagement the report described some of the key work undertaken with partners and communities to address health inequalities. Working collaboratively with communities, partners and councillors was essential in addressing health inequalities.

With regard to the next steps embedding learning and monitoring of public health activity would continue to be overseen and reported through the Lead Member, Corporate Management Team and Health and Wellbeing Board as part of core business.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The report be noted.
2. The Population Intervention Triangle model be adopted across the Council and it's work with partners as set out in the DPH Report 2023/4.

COU/124/24 Motion - Cllr Ted Strike - Consent Street Trading Policy

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

Whilst we recognise the need to update the regulations on the "Consent Street Trading Policy" the current rules are penalising craft stalls, Farmers markets and community events, something I am sure was never intended.

That Council, at the earliest opportunity amend the current rules to exclude all community events and Farmers Markets from these charges. These include, but are not limited to:

Ingleby Barwick Family Fun Weekend
Ingleby Barwick Community Market
Ingleby Barwick Light Switch on
The Thornaby Show
The Billingham Show
The Festival of Thrift
Northern Dales Farmers Markets
Norton Green Market"

The Worshipful the Mayor informed the meeting that in-line with the Council Constitution the motion will be forwarded to the Licensing Committee for consideration without further debate.

COU/125/24 Members' Question Time

The following question had been submitted by Councillor Tony Riordan for response by the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Cook):-

“The staff in Democratic Services had kindly provided members and officers with the dates of the Full Council Meetings, for the Municipal Year 2024/25 entering them into the diary as long ago as May 2023. This was greatly appreciated by members and officers as they could plan their other commitments, holidays, work, etc, around those dates.

Prior to the publication of the agenda for the last Annual Council Meeting on the 3rd of April, the date of the subsequent meeting of Full Council was last week, the 22nd of May, and had been for over a year.

Once this agenda was published, it became apparent that last week’s diary date, the 22nd of May, had been changed to today, the 29th of May.

I am informed that the date of the meeting was changed on the instruction of the Council Leader.

Can the Leader of the Council please provide members with the reason(s) he instructed that the well-established diary date of the 22nd of May was changed to today?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“Thank you, Cllr Riordan, for your question.

Firstly, it's important to clarify that setting the dates for Full Council meetings is not the responsibility of officers. The schedule of meetings is proposed at the Annual Meeting each year and voted on by all members. Any member can propose amendments during that meeting.

As Leader of the Council, whilst I can propose how our business is conducted, including proposals on meeting dates to be put to a meeting, the final decision is made democratically by all members at the Annual Meeting. The dates in the democracy diary before then are only indicative.

The change from the 22nd to the 29th of May was raised and agreed upon collectively at the Annual Meeting, not decided by me. If there were any objections, they could have been raised then.”

Councillor Tony Riordan asked the following supplementary question:-

“The proposed date was changed prior to the Annual Meeting on your instruction, can you clarify that?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“The dates are set at the Annual Meeting and are not set by officers. The dates are voted upon and are an agenda item at the Annual Meeting. There were no objections

to the dates and the change of date and I can clarify that the dates had not been set until the Annual Meeting.”

The following question had been submitted by Councillor Tony Riordan for response by the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Cook):-

“The Leader will be aware that on the 24th of January 2024, this Council debated a motion that, in part, related to Stockton Hotels Company Ltd (Hampton by Hilton).

The motion was carried and (in part) read,

1. To request Stockton Hotels Company Limited to provide copies of its profit and loss accounts so that this Council can publish them.
2. To request Stockton Hotels Company Limited to provide copies of its Directors Reports, so that this Council can publish them.

Can the Leader please inform members when the very simple task of compiling these previously written and retained documents, and publishing them, will be?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“Thank you, Councillor Riordan, for your question. There are two key parts to address: the provision of information by the hotel company to the council and the subsequent publication of that information.

First, regarding the provision of information, the council requested documents from the company directors, who must, by law, act independently of the council. These documents were provided, and any council member who requested to see them is able to. The independent auditors were consulted to determine what information the company must provide to the council to meet its obligations.

The second part concerns the publication of these documents. Once the information was provided, the council needed to decide how to publish it. As you are aware, from March of this year, we entered the pre-election period for the Tees Valley Mayor and Police and Crime Commissioner elections. During this time, the code of practice on publicity prohibits the council from publishing any information that could be deemed political. Given that the hotels success has not been approached in this chamber in a bi-partisan way, publishing this information during the pre-election period would have contravened the pre-election advice from the monitoring officer. Therefore, we had to wait until after the elections to proceed with publication.

Additionally, the council has obligations to ensure that any published information is accessible, such as through screen readers and other assistive technologies. We cannot simply publish unprepared documents on our website without meeting these accessibility standards. This work has now been completed, and the additional documentation is available on the council’s website. These documents will also be included in our regular schedule of published information under our publicity scheme.”

COU/126/24 Forward Plan and Leader’s Statement

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

Council last met on the 3 April for the Annual Meeting. Since then, Cabinet met on the 18 April and 16 May March and considered the following matters:

- The Scrutiny Review of Cost of Living Response
- A Programme Update for Powering Our Future
- The Scrutiny Review of Outdoor Play Provision
- A report on the Delivering Better Value Agreement with DfE
- A Progress Update on Fairer Stockton on Tees
- The implementation of Selective Licensing of Private Rented Accommodation
- The Director of Public Health's Annual Report 2023 to 2024

Cabinet would meet again on 17 June and consider:

- A Scrutiny Review of Access to GPs and Primary Medical Care
- A Scrutiny Review of Unauthorised Roadside Advertising
- A Regeneration Update considering Thornaby Town Centre and Billingham Town Centre
- A Council Plan Update

The next meeting of full Council would be on 24 July.

Members were reminded of the fact that a general election has been called for 4 July and the Council was now in the pre-election period. The monitoring officer had issued advice to members and officers in respect of this period.

Some highlights coming up soon will be the Eid Fuson Festival on 2 June, D-Day commemoration on 6 June and Armed Forces Day on Thursday 27 June.

COUNCIL PUBLIC QUESTIONS

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?”

Second question:-

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

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?”

Second Question:-

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?

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?”

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MOTION

Motion submitted by Cllr Niall Innes, to be seconded by Cllr 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."

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AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO COUNCIL

24 JULY 2024

REPORT OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

ENHANCED SUPPORT FOR CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

SUMMARY

Council is asked to agree that 'care experience' is recognised as a locally protected characteristic to demonstrate the Council's commitment as a Corporate Parent. This ensures that our care-experienced young people do not face inequality and that their needs are at the heart of all our decision-making, alongside other groups who formally share a protected characteristic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

DETAIL

1. Members are asked to note the report to Cabinet at Appendix 1, this sets out a range of measures to support care-experienced young people. The report includes a proposal to be considered by the Council for the recognition of 'care experience' as a locally protected characteristic. The rationale for this designation is set out in the Cabinet report.
2. The report was due to be considered by Cabinet at its latest meeting on 18 July 2024.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

The measures will have a borough-wide impact, helping care experienced young people across all wards.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Southampton City Council, Corporate Rent Guarantor Policy 2024

Name of Contact Officer: Majella McCarthy

Post Title: Director of Children's Services

Email Address: Majella.mccarthy@stockton.gov.uk

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AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

18 JULY 2024

**REPORT OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

COUNCIL DECISION / CABINET DECISION

Children and Young People - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Lisa Evans

ENHANCED SUPPORT FOR CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

SUMMARY

This report recommends measures aimed at enhancing the support provided to our care experienced young people within Stockton-on-Tees. The proposals include recognising 'Care Experienced' as a locally protected characteristic, an employability support pledge from the Council, a pilot corporate rent guarantor scheme and the funding of shortfall in private rental tenancies. These measures aim to improve housing, employability prospects, and overall support for our care experienced young people, ensuring their needs are appropriately prioritised in decision-making. The measures will support the Council to fulfil its role as a corporate parent.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)/DECISION(S)

The recommendations are targeted to address some of the barriers faced by our care experienced young people, including discrimination, lack of stable housing, and challenges in gaining employment. By implementing these measures, the Council can show its commitment to providing equitable support and improving outcomes for care experienced individuals. This approach is designed to address some of the systemic challenges that care experienced young people face, ensuring they receive the support needed to thrive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Recommend to Council that 'Care Experienced' is formally recognised as a locally protected characteristic within the Borough, ensuring that the needs of care experienced young people are prioritised in all Council decision-making processes.
2. Endorse additional employability support for care experienced young people aged 16-25, including prioritised access to apprenticeship and job vacancies, guaranteed interviews for those meeting essential criteria, and the Council's commitment to the national Care Leaver Covenant.
3. Approve a pilot Corporate Rent Guarantor scheme for our care experienced young people.

4. Note that the pilot will inform a more detailed business case. An evaluation report will be presented after the 12-month pilot.

DETAIL

Recognition of 'Care Experienced' as a locally Protected Characteristic

1. Care experienced individuals face barriers and discrimination across many aspects of life, including housing, health, education, employment, and social interactions. Recognising 'Care Experienced' as a locally protected characteristic will show the Council's commitment to reducing these disparities and providing support which is fair to these young people.
2. By recognising care leavers as a locally protected characteristic, the Council will be formally acknowledging that those with care experience can face discrimination, stigma, and prejudice. This recognition will show the Council's commitment to equality of opportunity between those with care experience and those without. Future services and policies made and adopted by the Council should be assessed with due regard to the impact on care experienced individuals.
3. Care experienced people will all too often face discrimination and stigma in various aspects of life, which may lead to poor outcomes. This includes difficulties in securing suitable stable housing, accessing education, obtaining employment, and navigating social interactions. Left unaddressed, these barriers can perpetuate cycles of disadvantage, making it crucial for the Council to intervene.
4. A person becomes care experienced when they have been in the care of a local authority, including both those who leave care during childhood and adults who were in care as children. This group includes those who might have experienced foster care, residential care, or other forms of state care.
5. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care (May 2022) recommended that the Government make Care Experience a locally protected characteristic, which would provide for improved legal recognition of the need to implement supportive policies. This recommendation highlights the importance of recognising the unique challenges faced by care experienced individuals.
6. Although to date central Government has not yet taken steps to adopt this recommendation, many local authorities have already moved forward with it. Approximately 58 local authorities have introduced care experience as a locally protected characteristic, recognising the unique challenges faced by this group, including locally Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council.
7. Local authorities in England have statutory duties to certain groups of care experienced young people, particularly those aged 16-25. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is committed to improving the life chances of care leavers and has developed a range of support services to meet their needs. These services aim to bridge the gap between care experienced individuals and their peers who have not been through the care system.
8. More work is needed to improve the life chances of care experienced individuals through adulthood, requiring a better response from council services and our partners. By recognising care experience as a locally protected characteristic, we can help address lifelong inequalities and ensure that care experienced young people have equal opportunities to succeed.

9. Evidence shows that care experienced people are more likely to experience poorer outcomes across various indicators, highlighting the need for targeted interventions. For instance, they are more likely to face educational disruptions, mental health challenges, and difficulties in securing stable housing and employment.
10. Recognising 'Care Experienced' as a locally protected characteristic will serve as a cornerstone in the Council's efforts to provide comprehensive support to care experienced young people. This formal recognition not only raises awareness about the unique challenges faced by this group but also ensures that their needs are properly considered in all Council decisions.

Employability Support Pledge

11. The transition to independent living can be particularly challenging for care leavers who often lack the support systems available to their peers. Enhanced employability support is crucial for their stability and financial independence. In order to better meet our obligations as a good corporate parent a package of measures designed to support employability is proposed which would encompass the following measures.
12. Care experienced young people will have the opportunity to engage in personalised One-to-One discussions with employment and training advisors at the Employment & Training Hub. These discussions will focus on assessing work readiness, identifying career goals, and providing support with CV writing, interview techniques, and job searches. This personalised approach ensures that each care experienced young person receives guidance tailored to their specific needs and career aspirations. By providing bespoke support, the Council aims to boost the confidence and job readiness of care experienced young people.
13. Care experienced young people will have prioritised access to apprenticeship opportunities within the Council and where possible with local businesses. Guaranteed interviews for Council recruitments will be offered so long as they meet the essential criteria. This ensures that care experienced young people have a fair chance of securing employment within the Council, providing them with stable and meaningful career opportunities. Apprenticeships offer a valuable pathway to skills development and long-term employment prospects.
14. The Council will encourage local businesses to support care leavers through the Care Leaver Covenant, providing work experience, mentoring, and other support. By fostering partnerships with local businesses, the Council aims to widen the network of support for care leavers, opening doors to employment opportunities.
15. Up to 10 paid work placements will be offered annually, lasting between 1 week and 12 months. These placements will have clearly defined roles and responsibilities to ensure meaningful experiences. Placements will provide real-world experience and skills development with ongoing support from mentors and supervisors. These placements will be designed to build confidence and equip care experienced young people with the skills needed to succeed in the job market. Work placements offer a firsthand experience of the workplace.
16. These measures will be supported through the Employment & Training Hub by career advisors who will offer guidance to care experienced young people, helping them find suitable career paths and prepare for the job market.
17. The employability support pledge is designed to provide immediate and long-term benefits for care experienced young people. By equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and experience needed to succeed in the job market, the Council aims to reduce the risk of unemployment and

underemployment. Stable employment is a key factor in achieving financial independence and long-term stability, making this support vitally important for the overall well-being of care experienced individuals.

18. It is hoped that by fostering partnerships with local businesses and encouraging them to support care leavers, the Council will increase the overall support available to our care leavers.

Corporate Rent Guarantor Scheme

19. Care experienced individuals often face significant barriers in accessing stable and affordable housing. These barriers include discrimination by landlords, lack of rental history, and financial instability. Accessing private rented accommodation can be difficult for care leavers due to financial barriers such as the requirement for a rent guarantor. The proposed scheme aims to mitigate these challenges by providing a corporate rent guarantor.
20. It is proposed that a 12-month pilot scheme will be run, initially supporting up to up to 10% of our care leavers. Eligibility criteria will focus on those ready for independent living, including young people in employment or at university.
21. The scheme will include regular monitoring and support from care leavers PAs to address any issues early and provide ongoing support.
22. The pilot will be based on models used already within other local authorities. Running a pilot will provide valuable insights into the feasibility and effectiveness of a broader and more sustainable scheme, allowing the Council to make informed decisions about its future implementation.
23. Applications will be accepted from all care leavers, but it is not in the pilot stage anticipated to be significant numbers. Priority will be given to those in some form of employment or at university. Consideration may also be given to young people in supported housing accommodation with a clear rent account. By setting clear eligibility criteria, we will ensure that the scheme supports those who are most ready for independent living.
24. Applicants must show their readiness for independent living. This includes financial stability, responsibility, and the ability to maintain a tenancy. The readiness criteria ensure that the support is provided to those who are prepared to take on the responsibilities of independent living.
25. Applicants must agree to allow the landlord to contact their PA (or another named contact) for early support if there are issues with rent payments. This ensures that any potential issues are addressed promptly, reducing the risk of tenancy breakdowns. Early intervention is key to preventing homelessness and maintaining stable housing for care leavers.
26. The Corporate Rent Guarantor support will end after 12 months or when the young person turns 25, whichever comes first. This time-limited support encourages young people to build their independence while providing a safety net during the initial transition period.
27. The pilot will be monitored, and a report will be provided back to Cabinet approximately 12 months after the launch. The evaluation will assess the financial implications, improvements in access to private rental accommodation, impact on long-term housing outcomes for care leavers, and feedback from care leavers. Monitoring and evaluation are critical to understanding the scheme's impact and making necessary adjustments for future iterations.

28. Alongside the pilot, officers will draft a Corporate Rent Guarantor Policy. It is anticipated that the model may be similar to that adopted by Southampton City Council. The final model will be approved by the Director of Children's Services before implementation. Additional advice and training will be provided to Pas to identify appropriate young people for the scheme and support them in the application process. Subject to cabinet approval, the aim is to launch the scheme from September 2024.
29. The Corporate Rent Guarantor scheme is designed to provide both immediate and long-term benefits for care experienced young people by addressing one of the most significant barriers they face, accessing stable and affordable housing. Members will be aware that good, stable housing is a foundational element of well-being, and by providing a corporate rent guarantor, the Council can help care experienced young people secure housing that they might otherwise be unable to access.
30. It is anticipated that the scheme will not only provides a pragmatic response to the immediate problem of finding housing but will also support our care experienced young people in building a positive rental history. A good rental history is crucial for future housing opportunities, as it shows reliability and financial responsibility. By supporting care experienced young people in this way, the Council is helping to lay the groundwork for long-term housing stability and independence.

Shortfall Funding in Private Rental Tenancies

31. Members will be aware that Children's Services, the Homelessness Team, and accommodation providers have worked closely to support our care experienced young people in securing their own accommodations when assessed as ready. Historically, securing social housing for these young people has been a priority due to the benefits of secure tenure, affordable rents, and prompt repairs provided by Registered Providers.
32. However, members will also be aware that the national housing situation, now impacting our borough has made it increasingly difficult for young people to obtain social housing. Care leavers receive only Band 2 on the Tees Valley Home Finder, and only 50% of Thirteen's properties, the largest social housing provider in Teesside, are advertised on the site. Although Thirteen advertises the other 50% of its stock on its own website, *My Thirteen*, there is no priority status for care experienced young people via this process.
33. Consequently, the Council increasingly relies on private landlords to provide accommodation for these young people. While many reputable landlords do exist, the recent economic position has led to increased rents and higher upfront costs. Although care leavers are eligible for the one-bedroom rate of Local Housing Allowance (Housing Benefit) until age 25, currently capped at £94.36 per week or £408.89 per month, any amount above this creates a shortfall for non-working young people.
34. At present there is currently a lack of good quality properties in needed areas in Stockton at the one-bedroom Local Housing Allowance rate. This situation forces young people to either forego the private rental market due to affordability or to live in areas with high levels of antisocial behaviour, crime, and other vulnerabilities. While Children's Services cover upfront costs like bonds and rent in advance payments to secure private rental properties, these measures are no longer sufficient as monthly rents remain out of reach and unaffordable.
35. The objective of the measure being proposed is to provide financial support to young people assessed as ready to live independently but struggling to secure housing via social routes. The

Council will cover any shortfall between the Local Housing Allowance rate (covered by Housing Benefit) and the rent cost per month, up to £600, for up to six months. This initiative aims to help young people secure a property and gain stability while receiving support to secure employment and financial advice from the Welfare Assistance Team.

36. Currently, Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) is offered by the homelessness and housing solutions team for up to £600 for six months to help homeless households access private sector accommodations. This proposal extends similar support to young people who are not homeless but are assessed as ready to live independently.
37. This proposal offers several benefits. It provides a viable alternative to social housing, which has high waiting times and a lack of one-bedroom properties. It assures landlords that rents will be paid in full, alongside any relevant housing benefit claims. This improves 'move on' and throughput within supported housing services and prevents young people from taking on unaffordable tenancies, reducing the risk of rent arrears and future housing issues. Additionally, it reduces the risk of care leavers becoming homeless due to a lack of housing options and eviction due to rent arrears. It gives care leavers more choices to live in desirable areas without worries of antisocial behaviour and other risks, helping them maintain links with positive peers and family members. Moreover, it builds strong, trusting relationships with private sector landlords and prevents young people from being placed in temporary accommodations due to homelessness. It also offers security and peace of mind for private sector landlords knowing rent is guaranteed for six months.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

38. The measures outlined will significantly impact the local community by improving the life outcomes for care experienced young people. Recognising 'Care Experienced' as a locally protected characteristic, providing tailored employability support, and ensuring stable housing through the rent guarantor scheme will it is anticipated foster a more inclusive and supportive community environment. By addressing the specific needs of care experienced young people, the Council will support the goal of a fairer Stockton-on-Tees where all residents have the opportunity to succeed.
39. Shortfall Funding in Private Rental Tenancies plan would reduce rough sleepers and care leavers in unsuitable accommodations, drive practice improvement as identified in the Strengthening Service Plan and support the care leavers' offer. It would reduce the need for temporary accommodations via the Homelessness Team and complement the proposed HPO role within Children's Services and the Rent Guarantor Scheme. Overall, this plan would significantly enhance the lives and experiences of our care leavers.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

40. The measures directly support the Council's role as a good corporate parent, ensuring that care experienced young people receive the same level of care and support as any other young person in our borough. This includes promoting their well-being, supporting their educational and employment aspirations, and providing stable housing. As a good corporate parent, it is incumbent upon the Council to address the inequalities faced by care experienced young people, ensuring they have the same opportunities as their peers. This commitment underscores the Council's dedication to fulfilling its responsibilities and improving the lives and outcomes of care experienced individuals.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

41. Taken together, the measures will require funding for employability support and potential costs related to the rent guarantor scheme. These investments are expected to yield long-term benefits by improving the life outcomes of care experienced young people and reducing the need for more intensive and costly interventions in the future.
42. There are no direct financial implications expected from the recognition of care experienced as a locally protected characteristic, although such recognition may have indirect effects as we shape and transform services to include due regard to the characteristics.
43. The financial costs for work placements will be covered within Children’s Services budget, with £75,000 allocated for 2024-25. The apprenticeships will be funded similarly to other apprenticeship vacancies, with 50% salary support allocated from the MTFP and 50% covered by the service area’s existing budgets.
44. Potential costs will be incurred within the Corporate Rent Guarantor scheme if tenants default on rent. An average monthly rent of £633 will be used for financial planning.
45. Assuming an initial take up of 10 properties all result in a default (requiring the Council to pay the rent) based on the current average rent of £633.00 for all properties

Default period			
3 months	6 months	9 months	12 months
£18,990	£37,980	£56,970	£75,960

46. In terms of the likelihood of default rates, information available on a Kent County Council scheme (one of the first to adopt a Corporate Guarantor Scheme) indicated in their initial pilot scheme which acted as a guarantor for 97 care leavers, only 1 young person defaulted.
47. For the Shortfall Funding in Private Rental Tenancies the financial support will cover the shortfall between the Local Housing Allowance rate and rent cost, up to £600 per month for six months. Cost analysis reveals that the shortfall per month for one young person is £191.31, with a total cost for one young person over six months amounting to £1147.86. Only young people assessed by the Accommodation Panel as ready for independent living will be considered for funding. This proposal could alleviate bed blocks within supported accommodations, enabling young people aged 16/17 in residential placements to move into supported accommodations. The estimated cost for 22 young people is approximately £25K. Potential savings for moving one young person from residential to supported accommodation are £116K over six months, with potential weekly savings for 12 young people around £53K.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

48. Recognising ‘Care Experienced’ as a locally protected characteristic aligns with the Council’s commitment to promoting equality and non-discrimination. While not enforceable under the Equality Act 2010, the initiative to recognise care experience as being equivalent to a locally protected characteristic under the act has a degree of legislative weight as it aligns closely with our corporate parenting obligations and our duties under the Children Act 1989 and Children and Social Work Act 2017.

49. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires local authorities to publish information about the services it offers to care leavers which may assist them in preparing for adulthood and independent living. These services may include health and wellbeing, education and training, employment, accommodation, and participation in society. The measures recommended in this report will help enhance the council's local offer and support the discharge of our duties as a good corporate parent under the legislation. Corporate Parenting is an important part of OFSTED inspection Framework and remains an area where we are striving to make improvements.

RISK ASSESSMENT

50. A more detailed risk assessment of the guarantor scheme will be undertaken during the pilot. At this stage, high-level risks identified include rent default, landlords' preference for a personal guarantor, and some landlords not willing to accept a Corporate Guarantor. Initial contact with landlords in the Council's Landlord Accreditation Scheme has been positive. Evidence from other councils implementing similar schemes suggests that the level of default is expected to be low. Risk management strategies will be implemented to mitigate these risks, ensuring the scheme's success and sustainability.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

51. The measures will have a borough-wide impact, helping care experienced young people across all wards.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Southampton City Council, Corporate Rent Guarantor Policy 2024

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