

CABINET

A meeting of Cabinet was held on Thursday 17 October 2024.

Present: Cllr Robert Cook (Leader), Cllr Pauline Beall (Cabinet Member), Cllr Nigel Cooke (Cabinet Member), Cllr Lisa Evans (Cabinet Member), Cllr Clare Besford (Cabinet Member), Cllr Steve Nelson (Cabinet Member) and Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE (Cabinet Member).

Officers: Mike Greene (CEO), Garry Cummings (DCE&F, T&P), Reuben Kench (DoCS,E&C), Majella McCarthy (DoChS), Ged Morton (DoCS), Carolyn Nice (DoA,H&W), Tara Connor (CS,E&C), Jane Edmonds, Marc Stephenson (AH&W), Vanessa Housley (ChS), Peter Bell, Geraldine Brown, Julie Butcher and Kirsty Grundy.

Also in attendance: Cllr Carol Clark (Chair of Children & Young People), Cllr Barbara Inman (Vice Chair of Children and Young People), Cllr Lynn Hall and Cllr Sylvia Walmsley

Apologies:

CAB/46/24 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

CAB/47/24 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

CAB/48/24 Minutes

The minutes were approved and signed as a correct record.

CAB/49/24 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Annual Complaints Report

Consideration was given to a report that provided the details of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's annual review letter for the Council for 2023/24. There were 48 enquiries submitted to the Ombudsman during the year, 13 met the threshold for a detailed investigation by the Ombudsman. Of the 13 complaint investigations, 8 were upheld. All recommendations made by the Ombudsman, following their investigations, had been accepted and implemented by the Council. There was one formal public interest report that was published in 2023/24 relating to school transport.

A copy of the 2023/24 performance tables received from the LGSCO was attached as an appendix to the report. A useful guide to interpretation of the Ombudsman's statistics was available on the LGSCO website.

Comparative data of neighbouring authorities and CIPFA authorities was also attached to the report.

RESOLVED that the report which set out that the Council had fully complied with the recommendations from complaints investigated by the Ombudsman be noted.

CAB/50/24 Powering Our Future

Consideration was given to a report that provides an update on the Powering Our Future Programme including:

- Transformation Powering Our Future – proposals for new ways of working and recommended options for the following reviews:

- Waste Collection
- Fees and Charges – Car Parking
- Fees and Charges – School Meals
- Fees and Charges - Non-residential care charge
- Administration and Business Services – Courier Services
- Community Safety and Regulatory Services.

- Communities Powering Our Future:

- Building our intelligence, skills and experience
- Rolling out an Appreciative Inquiry approach
- Partnership working
- Effective communication and Proud to Care campaign.

- Partnerships Powering Our Future:

- Place Leadership Board
- Business Ambassadors Group.

- Colleagues Powering Our Future – implementation of the Workforce Development Strategy.

- Regeneration Powering Our Future – work is taking place to re-frame this Mission with a focus on Place Making. Further detail would be brought to a future Cabinet meeting.

The Powering our Future Programme continued to drive the Council plans to be a bold, brave and innovative Council and work with partners to make sure Stockton-on-Tees was a fair and equal place, where everyone is proud to live and work, where our communities flourish and people feel they belong.

Significant progress had been made against all the Missions in the Programme, supporting the Council in the planned approach to carefully manage resources over the longer term. This would see the Council create a new relationship with communities, while providing efficient services that offer value for money and are valued by residents.

The Council approach continued to be iterative, building over time, to engage communities and undertake thorough reviews. This can avoid the need to make short-term cuts, which can be damaging to services and the residents.

The report provided an update on each of the Missions, for Cabinet comment and approval. Regular reports to Cabinet would ensure that the member-led approach drives the development and delivery of Powering Our Future.

This Mission would identify new and innovative ways of working that are better for communities and more efficient.

In April 2024, Cabinet agreed the scope for each of the Transformation Reviews in Phase 1 of the Programme. These provided clarity on the objectives for each project, in alignment with the Council's Mission Statement.

The reviews had moved into Discovery and Design stage. This work had led to a comprehensive understanding of organisational challenges, to develop and refine ideas for transformation making use of research, data and intelligence.

As part of this process, the Council had and continued to carry out extensive engagement with Members and colleagues to ensure robust challenge and feedback in shaping the change. This included:

- Members and Colleagues Marketplace Events (providing information about all Phase1 reviews)
- Colleagues Community of Practice sessions (managing interdependencies between projects across the programme)
- Member Briefings
- Informal Member Engagement Group (a cross-party group met in August to inform fees and charges reviews)
- Scrutiny Committees (the Scrutiny Programme for 2024-25 has been designed and agreed to inform reviews where areas of policy change are anticipated)

The findings relating to an initial tranche of reviews had been concluded. Drivers for change along with options, proposals and recommendations for transformation are summarised below.

In addition to the areas below, progress had been made in relation to:

- Discharge to Assess / Reablement – a new way of working is being progressed that would see the council de-commission current provision and reallocate resources for a more joined up approach to reablement. This would focus on supporting more people to live independently through a single-provider approach that makes every contact count and would support high performance of the local system, which was acknowledged as one of the best in the county. This is estimated to save up to £500,000.
- Placement Sufficiency Strategy – this operational strategy sets out our approach to provide a range of accommodation and support services that:
 - Keep children with their families of origin, wherever it is safe to do so.
 - Provide children with alternative, nurturing homes if they need short, or long-term alternative care or support arrangements.
 - Enable our children and young people with disabilities to live an ordinary life.
- Introduction of new practice for Children's Services – this supports us in achieving the objectives set out as part of the placement sufficiency strategy and includes:
 - The creation of an Edge of Care Team designed to work intensively with individuals, siblings and families to maintain them in the family home rather than take them into care. The team has been successful in keeping children out of care, with 73 children and young people being supported by the team since January 2024.

- The establishment of the Social Work academy and International Recruitment to address recruitment and retention issues.

An email from the Yarm Ward Councillors (Councillors John Coulson, Dan Fagan and Andrew Sherris) regarding the proposed car parking charges at Yarm was read out to Cabinet by Councillor Lynn Hall).

RESOLVED that:-

1. The recommended options set out in the report in respect of the Waste and Recycling Reviews be approved:

- Introduction of charging for green waste from 1st April 2025
- Introduction of weekly food waste and recycling service from 1st April 2026 with the acquisition of associated vehicles and the development of a Waste Transfer Station
- Cease the provision of the Community Recycling Centres with immediate effect.

2. The removal of the maximum charge for non-residential care be approved.

3. An increase in the charges to schools for the provision of traded school meals service to reflect the true cost of the service provided be approved; and increase the per meal charge for Council maintained schools to £3 per meal to reflect the increased cost of provision be approved.

4. The introduction of Free School Meals auto-enrolment as detailed in paragraphs 71 and 72 of the report be approved.

5. The changes to car parking charges in Stockton and Yarm Town centres be approved; including the removal of the first hour free parking and introduction of the rate of £1.50 for three hours stay in short stay car parks, alongside an uplift to long stay car parking charges.

6. The operational changes in respect of Administration and Business Services, Community Safety and Regulatory Services set out in paragraphs 76 to 81 be noted.

7. The changes proposed will contribute £375,000 in 24/25, £2,296,000 in 25/26 and £4,644,000 in 26/27 towards the budget gap estimated within the budget report to Council in February 2024, at the same time as delivering improved outcomes, set out in the detail of the report be noted.

8. The progress updates for other aspects of the Transformation Mission outlined in paragraph 10 of the report be noted.

9. The progress updates for all other Missions of the Powering our Future Programme be noted.

Cabinet Recommended to Council:-

10. Council approve £4.3m prudential borrowing for the acquisition of food and recycling waste receptacles, green waste bins, site preparation costs for a Waste Transfer Station and resurfacing of Wellington Square car park.

CAB/51/24 The Stockton-on-Tees Plan 2024-2028

Consideration was given to a report that provided Cabinet the final draft of the Stockton-on-Tees Plan 2024-2028, for consultation ahead of consideration by full Council in November 2024.

The Stockton-on-Tees Plan had been developed to reflect the drivers and priorities for the Council, partners and most importantly communities.

A high-level analysis of data had been carried out to give the Council a picture of performance and to set a baseline.

The voice of communities had also informed the development of a draft Vision for the Borough:

Stockton-on-Tees is home – a warm and friendly place, where we welcome others and come together as a single community. We are a diverse and inspiring Borough, culturally rich and with confidence in a future that we can all share and be proud of. At the economic heart of Tees Valley, we are a dynamic, safe and healthy place, where everyone can grow and succeed. We work together to reduce inequalities and remove barriers to opportunity. We are Team Stockton-on-Tees.

Five priority areas were proposed as the focus of activity to turn the Vision into reality. These are:

- The best start in life to achieve big ambitions
- Healthy and Resilient Communities
- A Great Place to Live, Work and Visit
- An Inclusive Economy
- A Sustainable Council

Further detail on each of these priorities was attached to the report.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The Stockton-on-Tees Plan (attached at Appendix 1 of the report) be approved for stakeholder consultation.
2. The Stockton-on-Tees Plan (attached at Appendix 1 of the report) be recommended for agreement by Council on 20 November 2024, subject to any comments received through community consultation.
3. Any minor amendments as the result of consultation are reviewed and agreed by the Leader of the Council, and that an overview of comments be provided to all Members of Cabinet.
4. If there are any comments requiring substantive change to the draft Plan, they are brought to a future Cabinet meeting before consideration by full Council.
5. Subject to approval of the Stockton-on-Tees Plan by full Council, Cabinet receive annual updates on progress and achievements. Alongside this, Select Committees receive regular updates on progress relevant to their remit.

CAB/52/24 'Going for Gold Family Fun Day'

Consideration was given to a report on Here to Help 'Going for Gold Family Fun Day'.

As part of the Council's commitment to tackle inequality and poverty in the Borough a series of Here to Help events were planned throughout 2024/25. The report provided an overview of the successful summer Here to Help 'Going for Gold Family Fun Day', summarising key outcomes and learning which would be to be incorporated into future planning. Attached at Appendix 1 of the report was a detailed post event briefing.

CAB/53/24 Scrutiny Review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment

Consideration was given to a report Scrutiny Review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment.

The Children and Young People Select Committee had completed a review examining Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment. A copy of the Select Committee's report and recommendation was attached to the report.

Based on the top challenges identified by Stockton Primary and Secondary Schools, the Select Committee decided to focus their work on two key factors impacting on educational attainment:

- Attendance
- Communication (vocabulary, oracy and literacy)

The overall aim of the project was to work collaboratively with schools and partners to explore what good practice already exists and what could still be done to support of families, establish innovative ways of working and make better use of resources through a renewed approach.

An Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach was adopted for the review. This approach promoted a positive mindset by:

- valuing strengths rather than focusing on deficiencies
- identifying what is valued and effective and building on that
- involving all the stakeholders to work together to agree solutions
- sharing the responsibility with all stakeholders for making the solutions happen

RESOLVED that Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council works collaboratively with partners and key stakeholders to deliver the following shared objectives:

1.Improve attendance

Support schools to improve attendance:

- Encourage school leaders' use of the Attendance Self Evaluation Toolkit to identify what is working well, and areas which could be developed
- Promote an inclusive and relevant curriculum - where a young person wants to attend
- Work with the Team Around the School Service.

- Ensure that schools are equipped to deal with health issues.
- Identify individual barriers to attendance to better target support and intervention with specific reference to young carers

2. Forge positive relationships

Ensure that school culture proactively forges positive relationships between pupils, staff and parent/ carers:

- Promote respectful behaviours from all partners including teachers.
- Involve parents in school life.
- Extend opportunities for enhanced transition.

3. Improve communication

Design, deliver and support parent/carer communication strategies:

- Use new technologies and apps.
- Implement communication strategies early ensuring that good communication is embedded across the school community.
- Consider single points of contact and how best to communicate (not relying on technology alone).
- Offer parent/ carer engagement training for all staff.

4. Identify and support young carers

- Raise awareness of young carer identification and support for pupils.
- Extend the range of opportunities for young carers to link with others socially.

5. Managing emotions

Strengthen environment and opportunities for pupils to manage emotions:

- Engage with the Healthy Schools Programme and Healthy Settings Programme
- Design and delivery of courses to meet pupil need and support parents, with specific reference to:
 - managing behaviour effectively.
 - supporting mental health and wellbeing – especially to de-escalate heightened behaviour or to reduce stress levels.
 - positive parenting skills.
- Strengthen the use of pupil voice to support development of school environments which better support them to manage their emotions.

6. Refine teaching strategies

Further refine teaching strategies to improve lesson enjoyment, encourage speaking and listening and strengthen understanding also ensuring that teaching is tailored to the needs of the individual child.

7. Developing speaking and listening skills

- Ensure the curriculum and school clubs provide opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills, for example through debating clubs.
- Raise awareness of regional and national opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills

8. Extend enrichment offer

Strengthen and extend curriculum enrichment offer which better matches pupils needs and interests:

- Extend enrichment to include kick-boxing; boxing; coding; cooking clubs; sports clubs and story.

- Extend and promote the Tees Active Offer to include First Aid, paddle boards (team building) and extend offer within school holidays.
- Engage with the Healthy Schools Programme and Healthy Settings Programme

9. Celebrate achievement

Extend the range of opportunities to celebrate achievement including recognition for out of school activities and engagement with local, regional and national awards and competitions.

10. Enhance curriculum development

Work with partners and labour markets, making more explicit links to future employment.

- Innovate a local curriculum.

11. Strengthen understanding of career pathways

Clarify pathways to careers early in school life:

- Design and delivery of courses to clarify current career pathways for pupils and parents, including vocational careers and options other than traditional routes.
- Employment & Training Hub to link with schools to notify parents of apprenticeships events.
- Promote aspirational/motivational approaches.
- Strengthen links between schools/parents/careers advisor.
- Share best practice regarding "careers" evenings/ events in primary and secondary schools.
- Invite parents into school who have unusual careers.
- Educate parents on opportunities post 16.

12. Strengthen transition arrangements

Ensure that transition arrangements better fits bespoke pupil needs, with specific reference to vulnerable pupils:

- Ensure plans are put in place well in advance of any transition.
- Consider transition to post-16 and post-18/19 as well as primary and secondary and school readiness.
- Consider transition between year groups as appropriate.

13. Enhance skills to respond to special needs

Increase range of opportunities to enhance skills in mainstream schools to respond to Special Educational Needs (SEN), Child Protection Plans (CPP) and Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA):

- Share best practice of integrating SEN pupils into mainstream schools.
- Promote vocational opportunities.

14. Review behaviour policies

Review behaviour policies to ensure that they are appropriate and proportionate and that inclusion policies align with behaviour policies:

- What happens when a young person is removed from the classroom. Where do they go? What teaching takes place?

15. Embed and extend pastoral support

Embed and extend pastoral support in schools targeted to need.

- Engage with the Healthy Schools Programme and Healthy Settings Programme.

16. Strengthen support for parent/carers to develop language and reading skills
Design and deliver courses and activities to develop reading and language skills.

- Promote Functional English Courses.
- Invite parents/ carers to support reading groups at primary school.
- Promote reading through free Enrichment/after school clubs.
- Ensure parents understand the importance of reading.
- Use school social media to help parents/carers learn
- Ensure materials are easy read/jargon free to involve parent/carers.
- Key messages being shared from antenatal contact.
- Work with Read Easy Charity - helping people learn to read.

17. Review cost of living responses to diminish impact

Review Cost of Living responses to diminish its impact, with specific reference to period poverty, food poverty and school uniform:

- Work with Child Poverty Network.
- Work with schools to better promote/communicate Cost of Living interventions.
- Encourage all schools to 'Poverty Proof the School Day'.

CAB/54/24 School Performance 2023-24

Consideration was given to a report that presented a summary of provisional headline performance data for the academic year 2023-24 in all Key Stages for all providers across the Borough.

Primary schools continued to perform well. 95% of schools were good or better (including previous judgements of schools not inspected since academy conversion). This was an improvement on last year and above average for both the region and England as a whole. This reflected the sustained impact of the work of the Education, Inclusion and Achievement Service in monitoring, challenging, intervening and supporting the sector.

Although outcomes had not returned to pre-pandemic levels, outcomes for Stockton-on-Tees pupils in the primary sector were mostly above provisional national average for 2024 on every measure at age-related expectations. However, the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standards at the end of KS2 had fallen below the provisional national average.

Secondary outcomes were above 2024 national averages in all areas. These results had been self-reported by the schools and academies themselves.

Post-16 outcomes (A*-E) continued to perform well. The area where they were not above national averages is in the top scores (A* and B) which reflected the regional picture.

Once again, many schools in the Borough had seen much higher than usual numbers of pupils joining the school during the academic year, many from out of area. For example, there had been 108 transfer requests for new arrivals from Nigeria, and 109 from Middlesbrough. However, 27% of requests (374) were deemed 'parental preference' with children moving from one Stockton school to another.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The report and standards and achievements across the Borough be noted.

2. The strong overall performance of Stockton-on-Tees schools at both primary and secondary phases be noted.

CAB/55/24 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2024

Consideration was given to a report on the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2024.

The report outlined how the Local Authority (LA) was meeting its duty to secure sufficient childcare and included information about the supply of and demand for childcare, details on any gaps in provision and an action plan on how they would be addressed.

The Childcare Act 2006 and 2016 and the associated statutory guidance for local authorities on Early Education and Childcare – June 2018, requires Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (the Local Authority) to secure sufficient childcare, as far as is reasonably practicable and within available resources, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 – 14 (or up to 18 for disabled children). Local authorities were also required to report annually to elected council members on how they are meeting this duty.

The next steps would include:

The sufficiency assessment would be placed on the Stockton Information Directory once it had been through the Cabinet process, so it was available for parents/carers, childcare providers, and employers.

Work would continue to assess sufficiency of places to ensure that parents/carers were able to access an early years funded place or a wraparound childcare place.

Further work would be undertaken on meeting the needs of vulnerable groups to ensure they can access high quality, affordable childcare.

Work with childcare providers and schools to either expand or create places in areas of where there is high demand.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

CAB/56/24 Peer Assurance Challenge of Adult Social Care by the LGA and CQC Assurance Update

Consideration was given to a report on the Peer Assurance Challenge of Adult Social Care by the LGA and CQC Assurance Update.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (the Council) commissioned an independent peer assurance challenge by the LGA to assess the ability of the adult social care service to deliver good care and support to people, as well as preparedness for a Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessment. On 23rd September, the Council received formal notification of the CQC onsite assessment, which would take place in the week commencing 25th November for 3-4 days.

The LGA assurance peer challenge completed in July 2024, mirrored the CQC assurance methodology and, whilst it did not provide a rating as the Council would receive from CQC, it did provide feedback on strengths and areas for improvement.

Overall, the LGA assurance peer challenge feedback was very positive and identified some strong practice, a supportive and committed workforce and effective leadership and partnership arrangements. It also identified scope for developing our emerging approaches for co-production, recording and record-keeping and to support evidencing of strengths-based working.

The current action plan (developed in November 2023) had been updated to reflect this feedback and would guide the service to make further improvements in its planning and delivery of care and support to the people of Stockton-on-Tees.

Appendix 1 of the report summarised the results and findings of the peer assurance challenge.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and agree with the recommendations and actions as defined by the Local Government Association.

CAB/57/24 Customer Service Excellence

Consideration was given to a report on Customer Service Excellence.

Customer Service Excellence (CSE) was a national quality mark that sought to reward organisations that demonstrated a customer-focused commitment to all that they do. Certification to the Customer Service Excellence standard was through a rigorous assessment process which included a review of documents that demonstrated compliance against each element of the standard and an on-site visit to observe practical evidence.

There were 5 criteria that must be satisfied with a number of elements within each. Compliance plus was awarded for elements where particular strength is demonstrated.

Accreditation operated on a 3-year cycle, with a full assessment in year 1 followed up by a 12-month and a 24-month annual review to ensure standards were maintained. Stockton Borough Council had been accredited with Customer Service Excellence since 2010 and had demonstrated continuous improvement through the assessment cycles.

The report detailed the outcomes of the 24-month review which took place June 2024, and confirmed that the Council had retained full certification, achieving full compliance across all 57 aspects of assessment with compliance plus for 17 elements, a further increase of 1 from the 2023 annual review.

Details included how Powering our Future (POF) themes had been prevalent in conversations between the assessor and staff and, in written evidence/examples submitted for assessment. It was positive to note that 8 out of the 17 Compliance Plus points achieved this year, reference how POF themes and projects had demonstrated CSE.

The report included information about the removal of the CSE accreditation body, UKAS from future external CSE Assessments and details the future delivery CSE Staff Awards, STARs Awards and Think Smart, Think Big scheme.