

Place Select Committee

A meeting of Place Select Committee was held on Monday 15th December 2025.

Present: Cllr Jim Beall (Chair), Cllr Steve Nelson (Vice-Chair), Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Hilary Vickers and Cllr Sylvia Walmsley

Officers: Jane Edmonds, Chris Renahan, Iain Robinson, Neil Bramma, Michelle Gunn and Andrew Corcoran

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr David Reynard

PLA/35/25 Evacuation Procedure

The Committee noted the evacuation and housekeeping procedure.

PLA/36/25 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Ted Strike wished it to be recorded for transparency purposes only that on item 6, Progress Update on Affordable Housing, he owned a rental property.

PLA/37/25 Minutes

AGREED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10th November 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

PLA/38/25 Progress Update of Previously Agreed Recommendations - Burial Provision

The Assistant Director gave a verbal update on the progress of the previously agreed recommendation two and three of the review regarding securing a new site for burial provision. It was noted the outcome was dependent on being able to purchase a site from land owners and so far, had not been successful. However, the matter remained under review. An update would be taken to Cabinet when required.

The number of burial years left in the Borough's cemeteries were being monitored, with the possibility that the burial rate was slowing. The Committee asked for a recalculation in burial years. It was noted that the number of cremations were increasing, possibly contributing to a decrease in burials. The possible provision of woodland burial was highlighted by members and would be fed back to the relevant team for consideration as part of a future update.

Overall, the update provided showed that the burial provision was on track and the next formal review would be scheduled to take place in 12 months.

AGREED that the progress update be noted and a further updated presented in 12 months.

PLA/39/25 Progress Update of Previously Agreed Recommendations - Affordable Housing

Members received a progress update on the recommendations following the action plan agreed in June, noting that five recommendations were progressing. The progress included:

- A letter had been sent to central government regarding the regulations for returning empty homes back to use and responses had been received, which lead to a meeting of MHCLG representatives who were interested in understanding the Councils Empty Homes Working Group. Members highlighted incomplete sites and empty properties. It was noted that Government had introduced a long-term affordable housing programme which may assist developers bring stalled sites forward for affordable housing purposes. Members were reminded that in relation to empty homes, where properties were not owned by the local authority, responsibility remained with the private property owner, and the local authority had limited powers to intervene.
- The housing website had been updated to include information on average waiting times and changes to the Common Allocation Policy implemented, prioritising applicants with the highest level of need. The impact of these changes would be reflected in the next report.
- A letter had been sent regarding Local Housing Allowance Rates not reflecting average rents and an acknowledgement had been received, however, no further response had been provided. Members discussed the wider affordability challenges in deprived areas and reference was made to the Renters' Rights Act and its role in addressing rent increases, particularly monthly increases. Members requested a follow-up be sent to the relevant Minister to ask them to reconsider Local Housing Allowance levels.

The Committee requested that the next progress report be presented in the next financial year, approximately six months.

AGREED that the progress update be noted and a further update would be presented in six months.

PLA/40/25 Scrutiny Review of Governance of Capital Projects

The Committee received a series of presentations outlining how capital projects, programmes, and interventions emerged and evolved, with a particular focus on transport, Thornaby Town Deal investment, and Ash Trees to illustrate the different types of programmes.

The Transport Capital Programme came from three main sources:

- The programme was primarily funded through the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), particularly the City Regions Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS). Examples presented included both generic and standalone schemes. The allocation of the funding to different schemes across the Tees Valley was made by the TVCA Cabinet
- Other Government funding streams, which involved competitive bidding, were often time limited and had extensive monitoring requirements.
- Developer Funded Schemes, which were either Section 106 schemes where the developer paid a contribution or Section 278 schemes, which were fully funded Developer contributions were paid following completion of housing developments.

Members were presented with a case study, the Elton interchange scheme, which was identified in the adopted local plan as necessary to support housing growth in West Stockton. The Council secured £10M from the Housing Infrastructure Fund in 2018, later converted from a grant to a loan, with the funding agreement signed in late 2019. Planning permission was granted in February 2021 following public consultation. The scheme was delivered through the council's project management processes with construction lasting approximately 18 months and affected by cost increases, utilities issues and other delivery challenges. The scheme was completed on site in December 2023, at a total cost of approximately £16m and was undergoing final safety checks with national highways.

Officers clarified that there was no net long-term cost to the Council, as repayment of the loan and further funding would be secured through development contributions as part of their planning permission.

Members questioned whether extra time for unknown factors was included the planning stages and were informed that potential delays were factored into project planning prior to delivery.

Members were also presented with the Thornaby Town Deal as a case study, which provided up to £25m of grant funding, subject to a minimum 20% local match funding. Stockton received £23.9m Members were informed that:

- The programme development followed a two-stage process, which included project identification and the production of HM Treasury compliant business case, validated through TVCA quality assurance mechanisms, and had prescribed governance structures and requirements.
- The budget and programme needed to be established before design, costs, surveys, and negotiations had taken place. This inevitably resulted in changes to scope, budget, and programme as more information emerged. Officers highlighted the challenge of balancing transparency and regular updates with the realities of evolving design requirements, commercial negotiations, and land acquisition.
- The importance of the local voice in shaping the project, as well as the high level of professional advice, was noted.

In response to member questions, officers confirmed that the significant match funding required at the bidding stage had been secured. Members noted that from the next year onwards, the Town Deal investment would be physically visible on the ground, reflecting the scale of delivery achieved. The programme was described as a significant success in terms of lobbying and securing investment for local priorities.

The final presentation included the LGA guidance definition of capital expenditure and a breakdown of grants and contributions, with the majority of contributions coming from Government departments and TVCA. The Ash Trees development was presented as a case study whereby two 10 place classrooms were located at Billingham South Primary School following consultation with key stakeholders. Members were advised that:

- School investments were primarily delivered through the Basic Need Grant (BNG) and High Needs Provision Capital Allocations (HNPCA), supplemented where appropriate by other capital funding sources such as developer contributions.

- Capital schemes were managed through established Council governance processes, with Cabinet approval, financial monitoring, and external grant reporting where required. The Council were required to respond to the Department of Education regarding how the BNG and HNPCA were spent on an ongoing basis

The Committee questioned how Section 106's were determined and informed that this was negotiated between the Council and developers. It was further questioned whether the Council had any PFI commitments and informed that there was one commitment which was due to expire in 2028-2029 financial year, therefore PFI was not a significant factor on the capital projects programme.

AGREED that the presentations be noted.

PLA/41/25 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2025-2026

Consideration was given to the Work Programme.

AGREED that the Work Programme be noted.

Chair: