

Council

A meeting of Council was held on Wednesday 21st January 2026.

Present: The Worshipful the Mayor (Cllr Stephen Richardson)
Cllr Stefan Barnes, Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Michelle Bendelow, Cllr Clare Besford, Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Diane Clarke OBE, Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Stephen Dodds, Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Nathan Gale, 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 Mohammed Mazi, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Jack Miller, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Paul Rowling, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Emily Tate, Cllr Jim Taylor, Cllr Hilary Vickers, Cllr Marcus Vickers, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Katie Weston, Cllr Paul Weston and Cllr Barry Woodhouse

Officers: Mike Greene, Reuben Kench, Carolyn Nice, Ged Morton, Julie Butcher, Jonathan Nertney, Laura Kelsey, Chris Renahan, Simon Grundy, Judy Trainer, Peter Bell, Sarah Whaley, John Devine and Junita Agyapong

Also in attendance: Press and public

Apologies: Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Vanessa Sewell, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Alan Watson and Cllr Sally Ann Watson

COU/68/25 Welcome and Evacuation Procedure

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

COU/69/25 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Kevin Faulks declared a non-prejudicial interest in item 10 as a member of CPAD Ingleby Barwick.

COU/70/25 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2025.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2025 be confirmed and signed by the Worshipful the Mayor as a correct record.

COU/71/25 Public Question Time

The following question was submitted by Eesa Din:

“What is the council’s current plan, budget timeline, to improve insulation in poorly insulated homes, especially in deprived areas? how many homes does the council expect to upgrade per year, and what funding sources are being used?”

On behalf of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing, the Leader of the Council (Councillor Lisa Evans) responded with:

“The Council coordinates many schemes aimed to improve energy efficiency measures in private homes. The schemes are all identified on a dedicated webpage: Energy saving schemes and advice - Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. Schemes vary in terms of eligibility and measures; most schemes receive direct Government funding and the Council acts only to verify claims and to check the credibility of the installers.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council do not have a specific budget to improve insulation in poorly insulated homes, and we do not directly upgrade homes.”

COU/72/25 Petition - Stop Further Housing Developments in Yarm

Consideration was given to a report presenting a petition calling for a stop to further housing development in Yarm.

The Lead Petitioner, Yvonne Wallace, presented the petition.

RESOLVED That the petition be referred to the appropriate body for further consideration.

COU/73/25 Appointments to Committees for 2026/27

Consideration was given to a report asking the Council to approve the appointments to Committees which remained with the Conservative Group’s entitlement following the recent by election.

RESOLVED That the changes set out below be approved:

Children and Young People’s Select Committee

Remove Cllr David Reynard, replace with Cllr Mubeen

Executive Scrutiny Committee

Remove Cllr Hugo Stratton, replace with Cllr Dodds

Audit and Governance Committee

Remove Cllrs Emily Tate and Niall Innes, replace with Cllrs Marcus Vickers and David Reynard

Place Select Committee

Remove Cllrs Hilary Vickers and Stefan Houghton, replace with Cllrs Tony Riordan and Dodds

COU/74/25 Article 4 Direction - Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

Consideration was given to a report highlighting the need to consider the introduction of measures to restrict the use of permitted development rights for change of use from

dwelling houses (Class C3) to small HMOs (Class C4). This was in view of growing demands for small HMOs and the implications on the Borough's housing stock and community.

The report asked Council to delegate authority to the Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member and the Planning Committee to produce a draft interim policy or Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to inform the determination of future applications for HMOs.

The report also asked Council to delegated authority to the Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth to undertake all necessary associated consultation.

RESOLVED

1. That delegated authority be given to the Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing and Planning Committee to produce a draft interim policy or Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to inform the determination of future applications for HMOs.
2. That delegated authority be given to the Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth to undertake all necessary consultation in association with resolution 1 above.

COU/75/25 Director of Public Health Report 2025

Consideration was given to the Director of Public Health Annual Report for 2025.

REOLVED That the report be noted.

COU/76/25 Members' Question Time

Question 1

The following question was submitted by Cllr Jim Taylor:

“Many proud residents within our Borough, who do not have access to their own gardens, rely heavily on the allotment provision by Stockton Borough Council to grow precious fruit and vegetables to supplement their ever-increasing grocery bills.

Will the Cabinet Member agree with me, that in August of this year, when the then Labour Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, gave the green light for eight cash strapped councils to sell off their allotments, resulting in a direct kick in the teeth to those residents who had cherished and cultivated their own small piece of England, was a disastrous mistake?”

On behalf of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing, the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care (Councillor Pauline Beall) responded with:

“We recognise the many well-being benefits that allotments provide for our residents, including enhanced physical health and social connection, as well as a space to engage with nature and develop new skills. I can happily confirm that the Council has

no plans to dispose of any allotment sites that are either managed directly by the Council or owned by the Council and managed by allotment associations.”

Question 2

The following question was submitted by Cllr Tony Riordan:

“Hopefully, the Cabinet Member will be aware of the dilapidated and dangerous property at 18 South Road Norton.

Will the Cabinet Member agree with me that the long standing and intolerable situation faced by residents and neighbouring properties of 18 South Road, who complain of rampaging feral gangs of youths armed with baseball bats transiting and damaging their properties to gain access to 18 South Road, who defecate and urinate in and around their properties, who threaten and intimidate them in their own homes if they dare to intervene, have been badly let down by this council and other agencies for far too long?”

On behalf of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing, the Cabinet Member for Access Communities and Community Safety (Councillor Norma Stephenson) responded with:

“I share Councillor Riordan’s frustrations with the state of this particular property and Officers are currently engaging with the owner regarding the need to take action.

The recent scrutiny review conducted by the Council’s Place Select Committee identified the issue of empty homes as part of its review focused on the availability of affordable housing and explored potential strategies to increase supply within the borough. Empty homes not only represent a missed opportunity to address housing need, but also contribute to neighbourhood decline, anti-social behaviour, and public frustration. The Committee recognised that returning empty homes to use could be a valuable tool in increasing the supply of affordable housing for both sale and rent. However, current mechanisms for doing so are often lengthy, complex, and require substantial capital investment from partners, including the Council and Registered Providers. Like many local authorities, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has implemented the Empty Homes Premium, increasing council tax liability for properties that have been vacant for two years or more, in an effort to encourage owners to bring them back into use. We also have an established (cross authority) Empty Homes Working Group, which supports owners in returning properties to occupation and, where appropriate, utilises enforcement powers across housing, planning, and regulatory services. At the request of the Scrutiny committee officers have written to the secretary of state for Housing who has replied thus:

“As you note, local authorities have a number of powers and incentives to tackle empty homes. These include, for example, the discretionary powers you reference to charge additional council tax, which we want to continue empowering you to use. It is also encouraging to hear that you and neighbouring local authorities have established an Empty Homes Working Group to coordinate activity. We note the challenges you have highlighted around the use of formal enforcement levers to tackle empty homes. As we outlined in the English Devolution White Paper, we intend to strengthen the ability of local authorities to take over the management of empty homes. Further details will follow in due course. We are also pursuing reforms of the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) process and land compensation rules via measures in the

Planning and Infrastructure Bill. These reforms will ensure quicker decisions on CPOs can be made; that the administrative costs of undertaking the CPO process are reduced; and that the balance of fairness in the assessment of compensation between local authorities and landowners is fully considered.”

We will keep the situation under review and take whatever actions are legally possible to resolve this issue with the landowner.”

Councillor Tony Riordan asked the following supplementary question:

“Will the Cabinet Member agree with me on behalf of the many neglected residents, who are angry, scared and frustrated at the lack of action to protect them and their properties, in the South Road area, and many other places within the Borough, it is incumbent on this Council, when the circumstances allow, to utilise their powers under section 215 Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Section 79 Building Act 1984, and Section 29 Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, to enforce the landlord into getting their property in order?”

The Cabinet Member for Access Communities and Community Safety (Councillor Norma Stephenson) responded with:

“I agree with the Member and there will many other similar properties across the Borough.”

Question 3

The following question was submitted by Cllr Ted Strike:

“Councillor Paul Rowling was recently reported as asking for residents’ views on “How to spend its money, and where it should save to fill a £11.3m budget gap?”

What assurance can the council provide that it is achieving value for money from its suppliers?

How frequently are supplier costs and contracts reviewed as part of the council’s procurement and contract management arrangements, including the use of market testing or competitive quotations where appropriate?

Finally, where elected members or members of the public identify alternative suppliers offering equivalent quality at a lower cost, what scope exists within the council’s procurement framework to consider such options?”

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport (Councillor Paul Rowling) responded with:

“The Council secures value for money from its suppliers through lawful procurement arrangements, delivered in accordance with the Council’s Contract Procedure Rules and the relevant public procurement legislation. These requirements ensure transparency, proportionality and competition, so contracts are awarded on an objective and auditable basis.

Supplier costs and contracts are reviewed on an ongoing basis through proportionate contract management arrangements, reflecting the nature, risk, value and complexity

of the contract. In addition, when contracts are due for renewal the Council reviews performance and pricing, including benchmarking and market testing where appropriate, and may undertake market engagement to inform specifications and pricing structures.

Where Members or residents identify an alternative supplier offering equivalent quality at a lower cost, that information can be considered, but the Council cannot operate on the basis of "someone says they can do it cheaper". Public procurement must be carried out transparently and, where required, through open competition. That is not optional: it is the mechanism that prevents closed markets, inappropriate preference and poor value outcomes."

Councillor Ted Strike asked the following supplementary question:

"Many have the perception that suppliers to the Council are over charging. For example, the Ingleby Barwick Community Partnership purchased a Christmas Tree for £370 including delivery yet a few yards away Ingleby Barwick purchased a tree from the Council for £870. Was there a handling fee charged by the Council or are they charging exorbitant prices?"

The Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport (Councillor Paul Rowling) responded with:

"We have to follow strict procurement procedures and I can supply these to you. We are also part of a wider joint procurement organisation to ensure that we are getting better value for money. If you have case studies, then please bring them forward as we are continuously monitoring the market to achieve best value for money."

Question 4

Member Question submitted by Cllr Ted Strike:

"I recently met an elderly homeless man whilst shopping. During my conversation with him I asked if he had contacted the council, he advised me he is known by SBC homeless team and they regularly check on him. He also told me he has been advised he is not a high enough priority.

My question to the cabinet member is:

- 1) How many people are currently recorded as homeless in the Borough of Stockton on Tees, and how many are rough sleepers?
- 2) What criteria are used by the council to determine priority need under its homelessness duties, and how does age feature, and which groups are a higher priority than the elderly?
- 3) What support and safeguards are in place for older people who are homeless but who may not meet the statutory definition of priority need?"

On behalf of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing, the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care (Councillor Pauline Beall) responded with:

"Question 1 Response

As of Friday, 9 January 2026, the Homelessness Service is actively working with 342 cases involving people who are either experiencing homelessness or are threatened with homelessness.

Rough Sleeper numbers fluctuate on a night-to-night basis. Since 2010, all local authorities across England have undertaken an official annual autumn rough sleeper count which provides a snapshot of the number of people sleeping rough on a single night. The Homelessness Service undertook a count in November 2025 and identified 9 people sleeping rough. This figure is based on a physical street count and intelligence from partner agencies.

On 9 January 2026, the Homelessness Service was aware of 4 individuals sleeping rough.

- All 4 individuals (noted above) were offered accommodation.
- It is not uncommon for offers of accommodation to be refused.
- The Homelessness service completes regular early morning 'sweeps' at known hot spots to identify rough sleeper (currently 2 sweeps per week). In addition, the service responds to reports of rough sleepers (made directly to the service or notifications received via Street Link StreetLink - Connecting people sleeping rough to local services).
- During adverse weather conditions, the Council will activate SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol) which aims to protect people sleeping rough by offering (where possible) emergency, short-term accommodation. In these instances, all rough sleepers are offered accommodation, regardless of priority or intentionality.

Question 2 Response

Housing authorities have a duty to try and prevent or relieve homelessness for all applicants who are eligible for assistance and are homeless or threatened with homelessness, irrespective of whether or not they may have a priority need for accommodation. If a housing authority is unable to prevent an applicant from becoming homeless, or to help them to secure accommodation within the 'relief' stage, they are required to reach a decision as to whether the applicant has a priority need for accommodation. In determining whether an applicant has a priority need, the Council adheres to the MHCLG's 'Homelessness Code of Guidance for local authorities'.

Statutory Categories for Priority Need: Under Section 189(1) of the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002, the following are automatically in priority need:

- Pregnant applicants or those living with a pregnant person
- Households with dependent children
- Victims of domestic abuse
- Vulnerable individuals due to old age, mental illness, learning or physical disability
- 16–17-year-olds (who aren't 'relevant' children under section 20 of Children Act 1989)
- Care leavers under 21 who were in care at ages 16–17
- People homeless due to an emergency (e.g. fires, floods)

In determining whether an applicant is in 'priority need' consideration is given to whether an individual is more at risk if they become homeless than most other people. Age will be considered within this assessment.

Question 3 Response

Safeguarding considerations are made in every assessment, regardless of age. Where safeguarding concerns arise, referrals are made into First Contact.

In all cases where eligibility and homeless have been investigated and confirmed, the individual will be issued with a Housing Plan. This will be personal to the individual, setting out steps for both the applicant and Council to take to prevent homelessness or secure accommodation. An advice pack with details for wider services and support agencies is also provided."

Councillor Ted Strike asked the following supplementary question:

"Can I ask the Cabinet Member to pass on my thanks to the Assistant Director and the Homelessness Team for their swift response in this matter. Homelessness is a blight on our country. Many rough sleepers start as sofa surfers and after becoming rough sleepers turn to shoplifting and substance abuse. Would the Council lobby the Secretary of State for Housing and Communities to introduce a cash incentive for residents to house homeless people similar to the policy that was adopted to house Ukrainian refugees?"

The Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care (Councillor Pauline Beall) responded with:

"I will ask officers to discuss this suggestion further with Councillor Strike."

Question 5

The following question was submitted by Cllr Ted Strike:

"House building sites are all over our borough and in a very short period of time houses become occupied and we then have a mixture of occupied houses alongside a building site which has its own dangers. Ingleby Barwick are extremely fortunate in that we have Community Public accessible defibrillators at a maximum of 500 metres away from any given point thanks to the amazing work of CPAD IB. When building sites are being constructed there are no way of volunteer groups for placing Defibs in those areas unless individual building sites agree. This means residents living in those areas and the workforce are not covered by these life saving devices.

Can the Cabinet Member advise:

- 1) How the council promotes good practice around workforce health and safety on major construction sites, including the provision of defibrillators?
- 2) What expectations the council sets for contractors on projects it commissions?
- 3) Given the limits of planning and regulatory powers in this area, whether the council would consider taking a leadership role by encouraging developers voluntarily, and by

lobbying Government and MPs for changes in National Law to require defibrillator provision on major construction and regeneration sites?”

The Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care (Councillor Pauline Beall) responded with:

“I thank Councillor Strike for raising an important issue regarding the provision and availability of defibrillators across the Borough, it is an issue this council has been proactive in for a number of years and one I know you have a personal interest in.

The Council’s Defibrillator Policy provides residents and groups with information regarding purchasing, installing, and maintaining a community public access defibrillators (cPAD), should they wish to do so. The policy also explains how residents can locate their nearest 10 defibrillators to a given location, through DefibFinder. At present, the approach of the council is to support community access to cPADs in areas of the borough identified as having the greatest need, determined by data from the North East Ambulance Service.

The issue of defibrillators on major construction sites is a separate issue. On those sites, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is the primary regulator responsible for enforcing health and safety legislation. Their role includes setting standards, carrying out inspections, and taking enforcement action where necessary. While the council promotes good practice and expects high standards from contractors, it is not the council’s role to act as the health and safety regulator in that regard. Several of the Borough’s larger construction sites have already provided defibrillators within their welfare facilities for staff, although we do not currently hold specific data on this provision. While this is not a statutory requirement under health and safety legislation, it is considered best practice and significantly enhances emergency preparedness on site.

The Council sets clear expectations for contractors on all commissioned projects which include a number of requirements around health & safety and officers would be happy to share or discuss these further with Councillor Strike should he so wish.”

Councillor Ted Strike asked the following supplementary question:

“Would the Council agree that CPAD Ingleby Barwick to a fantastic job and ensure that they will do everything they can to support them in their work, including reducing the charge for installing defibrillators on lamp posts?”

The Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care (Councillor Pauline Beall) responded with:

“We would have to look carefully at this in the current financial climate but will ask officers to enter into further discussions on this matter. The Council does encourage the use of defibrillators.”

Question 6

The following question was submitted by Cllr Niall Innes:

“The taxpayers of this borough were burdened with an eye watering bill of £1.65m to support the Ambassador Theatre Group with audience development and the attraction of artists in years one to five for the Globe Theatre.

Can the Cabinet Member please provide an update on the audience development along with the attraction of artists, and if the £1.65m has proved an astute investment?”

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture (Councillor Nigel Cooke) responded with:

“The figure of £1.65million referred to in the question is the agreed annual contribution set out in the lease agreement. This contribution is to the venue operator, Ambassador Theatre Group (ATG).

The contribution was £400,000 in 2021/2022, £350,000 in 2022/2023, and £300,000 for 2023/2024 and subsequent years. Taken over the 5 years, this totals £1.65m.

Stockton Council’s decision to bring the Globe back to life, rather than have a large, dilapidated and empty building in the heart of the town was driven by many factors, including pride in the place and impact on perceptions, which in turn affect economic growth potential.

The public and media coverage of the venue and the town generated by the Globe project has been sustained and positive. We should not overlook the fact that the media coverage of a collapsing listed building would have been sustained and negative. The Council’s contribution to the refurbishment and running of the Globe should be understood in terms of its overall impact over the long term.

The completion of the refurbishment and reopening of the venue was severely affected by the COVID pandemic. During the pandemic, a lot of international touring product, including music, comedy and theatre, was cancelled or postponed, and the post-covid recovery period affected audience behaviours as well as the availability of performances.

However, since opening, the venue has sold over 450,000 tickets, and whilst only a small portion of ticket income is retained by the venue, gross box office income has doubled over the period 2022 to 2025, from £1.5m in 2022, to over £4m last year.

Stockton’s support has helped ATG establish the venue amongst the artists and promoters’ community. Since opening, Globe has attracted an impressive list of performers and big-name acts, with many, such as Kraftwerk, Queens of the Stone Age and Kaiser Chiefs, choosing Globe as their only north east tour date.

We wanted residents and visitors to be able to see big names without travelling (and spending their money) in places like Newcastle, Leeds and Manchester.

The list of those performances we’ve attracted is impressive, including music by:

- Royal Blood
- Queens of the Stone Age
- Morrissey
- Paul Weller
- Paul Heaton

- Bowling for Soup & Wheatus
- Robert Plant
- Ocean Colour Scene
- Paloma Faith
- Adam Ant
- Jools Holland
- James
- McFly

Top name comedians have entertained our audiences, including:

- Sarah Millican
- John Richardson
- Al Murrey
- John Bishop
- Jack Whitehall
- Michael Macintyre
- Katherine Ryan
- Phil Wang
- Harry Hill
- Kevin Bridges
- Frankie Boyle
- Russell Howard
- Harry Enfield
- Alan Carr

In addition, we've enjoyed musical theatre that we would not normally see in a town like Stockton including:

- SIX
- Bat out of Hell
- We Will Rock You
- Pretty Woman
- Kinky Boots
- Rocky Horror Show

And events including

- BBC – Sorry I haven't a Clue
- Derren Brown
- Brian Cox
- Strictly: The Professionals

That's not a comprehensive list, but if we asked ourselves when we made the original investment decisions, do we want to bring this sort of entertainment to Stockton's High Street, I think we would have definitely said yes."

Councillor Niall Innes asked the following supplementary question:

"I am sure the Cabinet Member, as part of their portfolio, will be keeping a close eye on this investment and that it is bringing in shows that attract visitors from the region to spend their money at the Globe Theatre, and in Stockton Town Centre to provide the flawed annual £18m economic uplift figure.

Will the Cabinet Member agree with me that there is something clearly wrong with oversight of this huge financial investment when shows such as Tina Turner, The

Ultimate Tribute, 'What's Love Got to do with It', which I'm sure will be an excellent production, is being promoted at the Globe Theatre this year, with an average ticket price of £39.81 (parking costing extra), when the same show, without taxpayer financial support, is being shown at the Forum Theatre in Billingham, with a ticket price of £29.50 (and free parking)?"

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture (Councillor Nigel Cooke) responded with:

"I am a music fan and go to shows at the Globe and elsewhere. Ticket pricing is dynamic and based on demand. People have a choice to come to the Globe and tickets sell out quickly. Billingham Forum is a completely different environment and offer to the Globe."

Question 7

The following question was submitted by Cllr Niall Innes:

"On the 4 June 2025, the Planning Committee declined permission for an application to demolish the South Lodge at Preston Park and replace it with the erection of a metal structure, artwork, hard and soft landscaping, and other associated works.

Can the Cabinet Member please provide an update as to whether the mooted plans for a revised application for South Lodge will be coming forward, and if so when?"

On behalf of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing, the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (Councillor Clare Besford) responded with:

"A full planning permission and listed building consent in respect of works to the main entrance, including the demolition of South Lodge building and the erection of a new structure, at Preston Park Museum and Grounds will be submitted by the end of January 2026."

Councillor Niall Innes asked the following supplementary question:

"Can the Cabinet Member confirm that the £320k provided from levelling up funding by the previous government for the refused permission is still available in the council coffers (and has not been used elsewhere)?"

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (Councillor Clare Besford) responded with:

"Yes."

Question 8

The following question was submitted by Cllr Tony Riordan:

"In the Council meeting of 20 November 2024, the Cabinet presented their report to members recommending prudential borrowing of £1m to resurface the top deck (only) of Wellington Square Car Park, with the annual borrowing repayments of £80k generated from the new car parking charges commencing in February 2025. The

Council voted in favour of the recommendation and financial numbers presented to them by the Cabinet.

Can the Cabinet Member inform members of what the financial impact, following their U Turn in December 2025, will be on the lost revenue and how they intend to make up the shortfall to pay off the repayment charges for the prudential borrowing following that decision?"

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport (Councillor Paul Rowling) responded with:

"In the Council meeting of 20 November 2024 members approved prudential borrowing for a number of initiatives through the Powering our Futures programme. This included an allocation of £1m for resurfacing the car park at Wellington Square, with the borrowing repayments due to be paid through the new car parking revenue from the revised car parking charges. Members will be aware that, unless and until borrowing is actually incurred, there are no borrowing repayment charges. Council has authorised borrowing on the basis of the assumptions in place at the time, but no loan has been drawn down and the money has not been borrowed. There is therefore no repayment liability at this stage and no shortfall to be met.

Following the decision of Cabinet to change the car parking charges at its meeting in December 2025, it is now appropriate for Council to reconsider the previous prudential borrowing approval. The planned investment in resurfacing Wellington Square car park and proposed funding will therefore be presented to members as part of the Budget setting and Medium-Term Financial Plan Report at the Council meeting on 18th February. This will enable Council to reconsider the scheme and the revised funding assumptions and options available should Council wish to proceed."

Question 9

The following question was submitted by Cllr Tony Riordan:

"Council approval is required for all new capital schemes, acquisitions, or developments which require the use of prudential borrowing that is outside the budget. Can the leader/ deputy leader advise members of the procedure if the recommendation and benefits to support prudential borrowing decisions change?"

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport (Councillor Paul Rowling) responded with:

"As Members will know, Council approval is required for the capital programme and for the use of prudential borrowing within that programme, including the associated revenue implications and interest costs.

Where an individual capital proposal is approved on the basis of specific assumptions or anticipated benefits, and those assumptions subsequently change, the Council is not obliged to proceed with borrowing on the original basis. An approval to borrow is an authorisation, and borrowing is only incurred when borrowing is actually drawn down.

In those circumstances, the appropriate approach is for the scheme and its funding to be reviewed and, where necessary, reported back to Members through the usual

governance arrangements, including through Cabinet and Council as part of the budget setting process, the Medium-Term Financial Plan and the capital programme. This ensures that Members can consider the updated business case, affordability and prudential implications should any borrowing be undertaken.

This is consistent with prudent financial management and ensures that decisions remain based on the most up to date information available at the time.”

Councillor Tony Riordan asked the following supplementary question:

“Can the Leader please advise members as to what authority, or element of the constitution did the Deputy Leader rely on when he moved away from the recommendation and benefits provided to Council to support the prudential borrowing (for the £1m to resurface Wellington Street car park) when he announced, and implemented, arbitrarily, in November 2025, that a 1-hour free parking would be introduced in Council Car parks from the end of that month, until the end of January 2026?”

To assist, I am sure the Leader/Cabinet member will be aware that the recommendation (for this period) was in the report to Cabinet for their joint decision several weeks later, on the 11th of December.”

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport (Councillor Paul Rowling) responded with:

“A decision was taken in under the scheme of delegation for the pre-Christmas period. No borrowing was incurred; costs were met from revenue.”

Question 10

The following question was submitted by Cllr Niall Innes:

“Following the decision by the Labour Led Council to not extend their contract with Stockton & District Advice and Information Service for the provision of advice and information, can I ask the Cabinet Member to explain to members why this Labour Led Council, as highlighted by the CEO of Stockton & District Advice Service, provided that organisation with a contract, which last year amounted to £230k of unrestricted funding with no spending criteria attached?”

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport (Councillor Paul Rowling) responded with:

“Despite recent comments, the Council commissioned a service from Stockton and District Advice and Information Service with a defined criteria, set out within the contract specification for the provision of advice and information. Contract monitoring was undertaken as part of regularly meetings between SDAIS and Council Officers. The Council did not provide core funding to SDAIS.

The contract came to an end on 31st December 2025. This was following a detailed transformation review of welfare support services, which highlighted the services commissioned are no longer required due to the introduction of a new more efficient and cost effect approach to welfare support. We continue to commission SDAIS to deliver the Warm Homes Healthy People scheme and have also offered a revised

contract valued at £60,000 incorporating signposting to self-support for able customers, referral to alternative support providers for those requiring assistance, and face-to-face appointments for vulnerable customers meeting defined criteria. This offer was declined.

The Council maintains committed to supporting residents whilst ensuring value for money in the services it provides and commissions.

The new approach maximises self-serve options which empowers individuals who are digitally enabled to be independent, over 30,000 council taxpayers now use digital means to manage their council tax accounts suggesting a significant proportion of households are digitally enabled. To address financial vulnerability at its core the new approach focuses on prevention with data-led targeted support. There are a range of services available to the Council at NIL cost, an example being Governments Money and Pension Advice Service which provides a free debt advice referral process which the Council makes use of; debt advice was part of the contract with SDAIS and just one example of the services that the Council no longer needs to commission.”

Councillor Niall Innes asked the following supplementary question:

“Will the Cabinet Member agree with me that every penny of our tax-payer money must be accounted for and in this case this Labour Led Council has shown a lack of leadership and oversight, so can I ask him to provide to members, if not this evening, but within the next seven days a list, with the financial details, of all the funding arrangements to partner organisations, so that they (members) can understand what oversight and governance arrangements are in place?”

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport (Councillor Paul Rowling) responded with:

“If we can meet outside of this meeting to see what organisations you may be interested in, I can then discuss with officers what information can be shared. Council tax payers’ money should be spent appropriately.”

Question 11

The following question was submitted by Cllr Tony Riordan:

“Stockton Hotels Company Limited, set up by this Labour led council to run the Hilton Hotel, submit their accounts to Companies House each year as required.

Can the Cabinet Member explain to members why those accounts are presented in a different format, with varying information, each year that they have been submitted?”

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport (Councillor Paul Rowling) responded with:

“All the financial statements that have been published to date with regards to the Hotel have been prepared in accordance with the appropriate accounting standards. Namely those provisions applicable to companies who are subject to the small companies regime and in accordance with the provisions of Financial Reporting Standards (FRS) 102 Section 1A. These accounts have therefore been prepared and filed in accordance with the relevant statutory requirements.

For the first four years of operation the Council produced the accounts to be presented to Companies House. It also used an exemption under s479A of the Company's Act 2006 where a company is exempt from the requirements of the Act relating to audit of its individual accounts for a financial year if the company is included in the consolidated accounts drawn up for that year and the parent undertaking discloses in the notes to the consolidated accounts that the company is exempt from the requirements of the Act (which it was for Stockton) relating to the audit of individual accounts by virtue of s479A.

Due to delays in the audit of the Local Authority, group and pension fund accounts in previous years and for transparency the Board of Directors for Stockton Hotels Company Limited and Stockton Borough Holding Company Limited engaged an independent audit of both subsidiary companies, rather than utilise the exemption described above.

For the financial year 2022/23 a company called Tindles were contracted to undertake the specific task of producing the annual accounts and providing an audit opinion. There are some slight presentational differences in how the Council, Robson Laidler and Tindles present the information due to the accountancy software used, an example is the use of brackets and minus signs around figures, but fundamentally the accounts are presented according to the required accounting standards. The differences referred to are therefore presentational and reflect changes in preparation and audit arrangements over time, rather than any change in compliance.

It is also important to be clear that Stockton Hotels Company Limited is a separate legal entity. The company's directors, who acknowledge are also senior officers of the Council, act in their capacity as company directors and are responsible for the governance and statutory accounts of the company, taking appropriate professional advice, including from the external auditors, on the company's filings.

The Council's role is as shareholder, and accountability is exercised through the appropriate shareholder governance arrangements. The Council chamber is not a forum for the operational direction of the company and Members should avoid blurring roles in a way that could be interpreted as assuming shadow director responsibilities.

Separately, and in the public interest, the Council has agreed enhanced transparency arrangements in its capacity as shareholder, including the provision of additional financial information to the Council beyond what is required to be filed at Companies House."

Councillor Tony Riordan asked the following supplementary question:

"One of the statements that is not included in this year's accounts, but has been included previously, is under the title, Pension Costs and other Post Retirement Benefits, and goes on to say that the company operates a defined pension contribution scheme, and that contributions payable to the company's pension scheme are charged to profit and loss to which they relate.

Can the Cabinet Member please explain to members what the financial benefit from the Pension Scheme to the four persons associated with the company is?"

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport (Councillor Paul Rowling) responded with:

“I will provide a response and circulate this also to all Members of Council.”

Question 12

The following question was submitted by Cllr Lynn Hall:

“This labour Led Council, has recently begun a consultation exercise with residents and businesses of the Borough. It is entitled ‘Let’s Talk Money’ and seeks their views on how the Council should prioritise its spending.

Is the Leader of the Council confident in the detail provided to residents and businesses within the consultation pages?”

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport (Councillor Paul Rowling) responded with:

“We thank the 758 residents who took part in the survey. My answer is yes, we are confident in the detail provided in the consultation pages.”

Councillor Lynn Hall asked the following supplementary question:

“The Leader of the Council will be aware of the introductory page of the consultation exercise which reads:

“Every year Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is required to set a budget to determine how we spend our money. The money we spend on supporting people in our communities must balance with the income we receive from Council Tax, Business Rates, Government grants, and income from fees and charges for our services.”

Can the Leader of the Council please explain, following this introductory statement, why residents and businesses are being presented with an opaque current budget figure of £85m for Adult Social Healthcare, within the consultation exercise, when the same current budget figure was quoted as being £107m in the Executive Scrutiny Meeting just a few weeks ago?”

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport (Councillor Paul Rowling) responded with:

“The numbers quoted cover different financial years and include different services. The consultation numbers have set rules on which grants are included and excluded according to Government guidance.”

COU/77/25 Motions to Council

Motion 1

It was moved by Cllr Niall Innes, and seconded by Cllr Tony Riordan:

“Council notes that:

The Labour Government’s recent Budget has introduced policies that have significantly increased the financial burden on businesses, including higher employment costs, increased taxation, and a failure to adequately support our high streets.

Small businesses, independent shops, pubs, cafés, restaurants and hospitality venues are the beating heart of our communities in the borough of Stockton, providing employment, social value, and vital gathering spaces on our high streets and in our neighbourhoods.

Many of these businesses are already operating on tight margins and facing rising costs are now being further crippled by the Labour Governments policies that show little understanding of the realities facing local employers.

Labour promised a fundamental reform of business rates, yet this reform has failed to materialise. Instead, as a result of the Budget and the forthcoming revaluation, businesses are facing substantial and unaffordable increases in business rates.

Industry estimates indicate that over the next three years, Labour Government policies will result in average increases in business rates of 76% for pubs with many other small businesses facing similarly steep rises that threaten their long-term viability. This figure comes from analysis undertaken by UK Hospitality:

<https://www.ukhospitality.org.uk/hospitality-business-rates-reform-unravelling-with-urgent-action-needed/>

Under previous Conservative Governments, businesses received meaningful and targeted support, which helped protect jobs and keep high streets alive during unprecedented economic challenges.

Council believes that:

The Labour Government’s failure to deliver on its promises to reform business rates, combined with its broader fiscal policies, risks causing widespread business closures, job losses, and long-term damage to high streets across the country and those in our borough.

Local authorities have a responsibility to speak up when national government decisions are actively harming local businesses, workers, and communities.

Council resolves:

That the Council write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer expressing this Council's deep concern about the impact of the Labour Government’s Budget and business rates policies on small businesses and the hospitality sector.

That the correspondence urges the Chancellor to honour Labour’s commitment to fundamental business rates reform and to reverse policies that are placing unsustainable pressure on pubs, restaurants, and small businesses.

That the correspondence highlights the severe impact on businesses in the borough of Stockton-on-Tees and call for urgent, targeted support to protect jobs, sustain local enterprise, and safeguard the beating heart of our communities.

That the letter be issued on behalf of the Council by the Chief Executive.”

Following debate and in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.65, it was requested that a recorded vote be taken on the motion, which was supported by at least a quarter of the Members present.

Members in favour of the motion:

Cllr Stefan Barnes, Cllr Diane Clarke OBE, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Stephen Dodds, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Mohammed Mazi, Cllr Jack Miller, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Emily Tate, Cllr Jim Taylor, Cllr Hilary Vickers, Cllr Marcus Vicker and Cllr Sylvia Walmsley.

Members against the motion:

Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Michelle Bendelow, Cllr Clare Besford, Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Bob Cook, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Nathan Gale, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Paul Rowling, Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Katie Weston, Cllr Paul Weston and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

26 for the motion

21 against the motion

The motion was declared carried and it was

RESOLVED

Council notes that:

The Labour Government’s recent Budget has introduced policies that have significantly increased the financial burden on businesses, including higher employment costs, increased taxation, and a failure to adequately support our high streets.

Small businesses, independent shops, pubs, cafés, restaurants and hospitality venues are the beating heart of our communities in the borough of Stockton, providing employment, social value, and vital gathering spaces on our high streets and in our neighbourhoods.

Many of these businesses are already operating on tight margins and facing rising costs are now being further crippled by the Labour Governments policies that show little understanding of the realities facing local employers.

Labour promised a fundamental reform of business rates, yet this reform has failed to materialise. Instead, as a result of the Budget and the forthcoming revaluation, businesses are facing substantial and unaffordable increases in business rates.

Industry estimates indicate that over the next three years, Labour Government policies will result in average increases in business rates of 76% for pubs with many other small businesses facing similarly steep rises that threaten their long-term viability. This figure comes from analysis undertaken by UK Hospitality:

<https://www.ukhospitality.org.uk/hospitality-business-rates-reform-unravelling-with-urgent-action-needed/>

Under previous Conservative Governments, businesses received meaningful and targeted support, which helped protect jobs and keep high streets alive during unprecedented economic challenges.

Council believes that:

The Labour Government's failure to deliver on its promises to reform business rates, combined with its broader fiscal policies, risks causing widespread business closures, job losses, and long-term damage to high streets across the country and those in our borough.

Local authorities have a responsibility to speak up when national government decisions are actively harming local businesses, workers, and communities.

Council resolves:

That the Council write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer expressing this Council's deep concern about the impact of the Labour Government's Budget and business rates policies on small businesses and the hospitality sector.

That the correspondence urges the Chancellor to honour Labour's commitment to fundamental business rates reform and to reverse policies that are placing unsustainable pressure on pubs, restaurants, and small businesses.

That the correspondence highlights the severe impact on businesses in the borough of Stockton-on-Tees and call for urgent, targeted support to protect jobs, sustain local enterprise, and safeguard the beating heart of our communities.

That the letter be issued on behalf of the Council by the Chief Executive.

Motion 2

It was moved by Cllr Niall Innes, and seconded by Cllr Tony Riordan:

"Council notes that:

Recent major decisions taken by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council — including the purchase of Debenhams, proposals affecting The Shambles, and the introduction of parking charges in Stockton and Yarm town centres have generated significant concern among elected councillors, residents and local businesses.

These decisions have been taken within the framework set out in the Council's Constitution but in a way that nevertheless raising concerns about transparency and engagement on matters with significant financial and community impact. Many elected councillors and local communities being left excluded from matters with significant financial, economic and community impact.

As a result, this Council has attempted to progress projects that could have led to the eviction of local businesses, harmed high streets and damaged trust in the Council's decision-making processes.

Only because Conservative councillors stood up for residents and businesses across the borough has this Council been forced into a series of U-turns on these deeply unpopular proposals — a situation which should never have arisen had adequate engagement taken place from the outset.

Council believes that:

The Constitution of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council sets out how decisions are to be made and ensures they are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people, including through its Cabinet Procedure Rules and requirements around Key Decisions and the Forward Plan.

A Key Decision, as set out in the Constitution, is a decision that will be taken by the Cabinet or under executive arrangements and should be included on the published Forward Plan so that all councillors and the public are notified in advance of decisions likely to have significant financial or community impact.

Major projects which involve large expenditure, the acquisition or disposal of assets, or significant community impact benefit from appropriate opportunities for elected member engagement, even where the final decision rests with the Executive.

Council resolves that:

1. For the purposes of this motion, a “Major Project” shall be understood as any proposal or programme that meets one or more of the following criteria:
 - a) Involves capital or revenue expenditure, commitment or liability of £250,000 or more
 - b) Constitutes or is likely to constitute a Key Decision under the Council's Constitution and executive arrangements
 - c) Involves the acquisition, disposal or long-term lease of land or buildings
 - d) Proposes significant changes to town centres, high streets, parking arrangements or public spaces
 - e) Has a material impact on local businesses, residents or the use of community assets
2. In accordance with the Cabinet Procedure Rules and the Forward Plan requirements within the Constitution, all Major Projects, should, where they meet the definition of a Key Decision, be included on the Forward Plan sufficiently in advance of any decision being taken and circulated to all councillors in accordance with constitutional requirements.

3. Prior to any final decision being taken on a Major Project, the Leader, relevant Cabinet Members and officers are encouraged to:
 - a) ensure appropriate information is made available through existing governance arrangements, including financial implications, impact assessments and any consultation carried out;
 - b) consider the use of member briefings, overview and scrutiny, or other appropriate engagement mechanisms including voluntary referral to Full Council or an agreed Committee forum for pre-decision advice; and
 - c) have regard to relevant feedback received through those mechanisms.
4. Officers and members must continue to ensure that all Major Project proposals comply with the provisions of the Constitution relating to access to information, notices of Key Decisions and publication of the Forward Plan, so that decisions are made in a transparent and accountable manner.

This motion supports the constitutional decision-making framework, promotes democratic accountability and asks that major decisions affecting Stockton-on-Tees are taken transparently, with meaningful involvement of all elected members and adequate scrutiny.”

Following debate and in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.65, it was requested that a recorded vote be taken on the motion, which was supported by at least a quarter of the Members present.

Members in favour of the motion:

Cllr Diane Clarke OBE, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Stephen Dodds, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Mohammed Mazi, Cllr Jack Miller, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Emily Tate, Cllr Jim Taylor, Cllr Hilary Vickers and Cllr Marcus Vickers.

Members against the motion:

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

21 for the motion

26 against the motion

The motion was declared not carried.

COU/78/25 Forward Plan and Leader’s Statement

“Our last Full Council meeting took place on 19 November last year. Since then, Cabinet has met twice, on 11 December and 15 January, where we considered a

range of matters. The decision records for those meetings have been made available to Members.

Our next Cabinet meeting is scheduled for 9 February. At that meeting we will consider the budget proposals and the Medium-Term Financial Plan, leading to recommendations being brought to Full Council on 18 February.

The focus is simple: protect the most vulnerable, support our communities, and be honest about the pressures councils face nationally.

In addition, we are also due to consider reports on the Council's Tenancy Policy, Alternative Provision, the annual ISAG report, a report on Vulnerable Groups, the Council's Strategic Asset Management Plan, and an update on the Children's Front Door proposals.

Before I finish, I want to mention something positive for the borough. Preston Park Museum welcomed the opening of 'Perfume' on 17 January — an immersive sound and light installation that is already attracting interest. It's a real credit to Preston Park Museum and the teams involved — and a reminder of the pride we can take in what Stockton on Tees has to offer.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank colleagues across the Council and our partners for the work that continues day in, day out, particularly over the winter period.

On a more solemn note, next Monday, 27 January, is Holocaust Memorial Day, marking the liberation of Auschwitz Birkenau in 1945. We will commemorate this with purple memorial lighting. Holocaust Memorial Day reminds us why remembrance matters — and why we must stand firmly against hatred and prejudice in all its forms.

Finally, I look forward to seeing you all here again at our next meeting, the budget setting Council on 18 February. Thank you."