

Council

A meeting of Council was held on Wednesday 18th February 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 Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Richard Eglinton, Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Nathan Gale, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Mohammed Mazi, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Jack Miller, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Paul Rowling, Cllr Vanessa Sewell, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Emily Tate, Cllr Jim Taylor, Cllr Hilary Vickers, Cllr Marcus Vickers, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Alan Watson, Cllr Sally Ann Watson, Cllr Katie Weston, Cllr Paul Weston, Cllr Barry Woodhouse and Cllr Stephen Dodds

Officers: Mike Greene, Reuben Kench, Carolyn Nice, Majella McCarthy, Clare Harper, Ged Morton, Julie Butcher, Jonathan Nertney, Judy Trainer, Peter Bell and John Devine

Also in attendance: Press and public

Apologies: Cllr Dan Fagan

COU/79/25 Welcome and Evacuation Procedure

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

COU/80/25 Declarations of Interest

The Head of Legal Services advised the meeting that all Councillors present had been granted a dispensation to take part and vote on matters relating to the setting of the council tax, budget and precepts, setting the local council tax reduction scheme, members allowances, payments and indemnities.

No other declarations were made.

COU/81/25 Medium Term Financial Plan Update and Strategy

Council considered a report which set out the final proposals for the Council's 2026/27 Budget and Council Tax, together with the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) position to 2029. The report also provided an update on the Council's financial performance for 2025/26. It outlined the proposed budget for 2026/27 and the

indicative MTFP for future years, reflecting the provisional finance settlement announced on 17 December 2025 and the final local government finance settlement issued on 9 February 2026.

The MTFP provided an indicative financial envelope to support sustainable decision-making and prioritisation over the planning period, and that it would continue to be reviewed annually to reflect updated demand, inflation, funding assumptions and delivery progress. Like many councils nationally, the Council had continued to experience increasing demand for services and significant cost pressures, leading to overspending against the approved budget. The greatest areas of pressure were Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care and Home to School Transport. As a consequence, reserves had been required to cushion the impact. The report therefore included a Reserves Policy setting out how reserves would be replenished to ensure the Council maintained financial resilience against future unforeseen pressures.

The report highlighted that demand and cost pressures were expected to continue across the MTFP period, outpacing the increase in funding available. This had resulted in a projected budget gap of £6.7m in 2026/27, rising to £13.8m in 2027/28 and £18.4m in 2028/29. In response, the Council had identified a renewed Phase 2 of the Powering Our Future programme, incorporating outcome-based reviews, council-wide initiatives and efficiency programmes. This phase built on the progress already achieved through Phase 1, which had identified £9.9m of savings by 2028/29. The Council also noted that residents' feedback from the Let's Talk Money consultation had informed areas identified for review.

The scale and pace of required savings—particularly in the later years of the plan—were acknowledged as representing a significant delivery challenge. While the Council had a strong track record in delivering change through Phase 1 of Powering Our Future, Phase 2 would require early validation of assumptions, strengthened governance through the established gateway process, and regular reporting to Members. The report emphasised that, given the current low level of reserves, timely corrective action would be needed where delivery risks emerged, including revising sequencing, scope or mitigations as necessary.

It was moved by Councillor Paul Rowling, seconded by Councillor Lisa Evans and

RESOLVED

- 1) That in accordance with the Local Government Act 2003, Members note that the Section 151 Officer confirms that the following recommendations:
 - a) represent a robust budget which has been prepared in line with best practice;
 - b) provide adequate working balances;
 - c) set out that reserves and provisions are adequate for their purpose.

General Fund Budget

- 2) Approve a 2026/27 Council Tax requirement for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council of £134,206,810
- 3) Approve a 2026/27 Council Tax requirement for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council inclusive of Parish Precepts £135,318,668.

- 4) Approve the 2026/27 budget and indicative 2027/29 MTFP as outlined in paragraphs 54-129, the level of General Fund Balances and the release of reserves to balance the 2025/26 in year financial position as set out in paragraphs 13-43.
- 5) Note the outcome of the Let's Talk Money Budget Consultation as set out in paragraphs 44-46 and in Appendix A to the report.
- 6) Approve the reserves policy at Appendix B
- 7) Approve £1.428m of capital receipts to be applied to the capital programme, as set out in paragraphs 39-41, for the following interventions:
 - Therapeutic Children's Home
 - Xentrall ICT Network
 - Accommodation
 - Replacement Vehicle Ramps
 - Parks Improvements Programme
 - Foster Carer adaptations
- 8) This will allow £1.428m of Council resources previously earmarked for the above schemes to be transferred into the Transformation Reserve.
- 9) Approve prudential borrowing of £6.5m to fund vehicle replacement purchases over the next three years, with members noting the borrowing repayments will be variable each year reflective of annual spending requirements, described in paragraphs 61-69 and call on the MTFP outlined at paragraph 99.
- 10) Approve prudential borrowing of £1m to fund the resurfacing of Wellington Square Car Park with annual borrowing repayments of £80,000 per annum, provided for within the MTFP, and modify the pre-existing borrowing approvals accordingly.

Taxation

SBC

- 11) Approve the Council Tax for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council prior to Parish, Fire and Police Precepts be increased by 4.95%, which includes the Government Levy of 2% in respect of Social Care, i.e. to £2,139.91 at Band D (£1,426.61 at Band A).

Fire, Police & Parish

- 12) The Council note the Police & Crime Commissioner is proposing a precept of £20,867,528 which equates to a Council Tax of £332.73 at Band D (£221.82 at Band A).
- 13) The Council note the Fire Authority is proposing a precept of £6,237,743 which equates to a Council Tax of £99.46 at Band D (£66.31 at Band A).
- 14) The Council note the Parish precepts as set out in paragraph 143 of the budget report

Capital

15) Approve the Capital Programme attached at Appendix G & H.

Council Tax - Statutory Requirements

16) Members approve the statutory requirements for Council Tax as shown in Appendix I to the report.

17) The Council must set its Local Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme annually by 11 March of the preceding financial year. Cabinet therefore recommends to Council that the current Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme is retained for the financial year 2026/27 incorporating the updates for the prescribed requirements in regulations and to reflect updated income figures in the table at Schedule 1. The scheme is available here www.stockton.gov.uk/CTR.

18) That the Chief Finance Officer be given delegated authority, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport, to make further adjustments to the income table and/or disregard additional funds should the government issue revised publications with regards to these matters after 18 February, to ensure that Government's intentions for additional support is maintained.

Capital Strategy

19) Approve the Capital Strategy as set out at Appendix J to the report, including the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy and the Minimum Revenue Provision Strategy.

Treasury Management/Prudential Code

20) Approve the Treasury Management Strategy as set out in Appendix K to the report.

Investment Strategy

21) Approve the Investment Strategy as set out at Appendix L to the report. Organisational and HR.

22) Council approves the Pay Policy Statement including the pay and grading structure at Appendix M.

Members Allowances

23) Approve that Members allowances are frozen for 2026/27. This will mean that these allowances have been frozen since 2013/14.

Fees and Charges Policy

24) Council note the Fees and Charges Policy and associated estimates of income generation attached at Appendix C to the report.

In accordance with the Constitution, the vote was taken by means of a recorded vote and the voting was as follows:

Members in favour of 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 Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Nathan Gale, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr Paul Rowling, Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Katie Weston, Cllr Paul Weston and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

Members against the motion:

Cllr Diane Clarke OBE, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Stephen Dodds, Cllr Jason French, Cllr John Gardner, 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 Vanessa Sewell, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Emily Tate, Cllr Jim Taylor, Cllr Hilary Vickers, Cllr Marcus Vickers, Cllr Alan Watson and Cllr Sally Ann Watson.

29 for the motion.

26 against the motion.