

Date:

Monday 11 May 2026 at 4.00 pm

Venue:

Council Chamber, Dunedin House, Columbia Drive, Thornaby, Stockton-on-Tees TS17 6BJ

Cllr Marilyn Surtees (Chair)

Cllr Paul Weston (Vice-Chair)

Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley and Cllr Barry Woodhouse

Agenda

1. Livestreaming

This meeting will be filmed for live and / or subsequent broadcast on the Council's website. The whole of the meeting will be filmed, except where there are confidential or exempt items, and the footage will be on the website for 12 months. A copy of it will also be retained in accordance with the Council's data retention policy.

If you attend and make a representation to the meeting, you will be deemed to have consented to being filmed. When admitted to the Council Chamber you are also consenting to being filmed and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings for livestreaming and / or training purposes. If you do not wish to have your image captured, please contact Democratic Services prior to attending the meeting.

If there are any technical difficulties with the livestreaming, the meeting will still proceed.

2. Evacuation Procedure (Pages 7 - 10)

3. Apologies for Absence

4. Declarations of Interest

5. Minutes (Pages 11 - 14)

To approve the minutes of the last meeting held on 13th April 2026

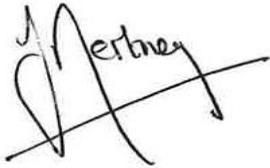
6. Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Provision (Pages 15 - 36)

7. Progress Update - Review of Disabled Facilities Grants (Pages 37 - 48)

8. Overview Report: Corporate Services and Revenues, Benefits and Welfare Services (Pages 49 - 68)

9. Chair's Update and Work Programme 2026-2027

(Pages 69 - 70)



Jonathan Nertney
Head of Democratic Services
Thursday 30 April 2026

Members of the Public - Rights to Attend Meeting

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

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

Contact: Scrutiny Officer Michelle Gunn on email michelle.gunn@stockton.gov.uk

Key – Declarable interests are :-

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

Members – Declaration of Interest Guidance



Table 1 - Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

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

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

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

Table 2 – Other Registerable Interest

You must register as an Other Registrable Interest:

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

Council Chamber, Dunedin House Evacuation Procedure & Housekeeping

Entry

Entry to the Council Chamber is via the Council Chamber entrance indicated on the map below.



In the event of an emergency alarm activation, everyone should immediately start to leave their workspace by the nearest available signed Exit route.

The emergency exits are located via the doors on either side of the raised seating area at the front of the Council Chamber.

Fires, explosions, and bomb threats are among the occurrences that may require the emergency evacuation of Dunedin House. Continuous sounding and flashing of the Fire Alarm is the signal to evacuate the building or upon instruction from a Fire Warden or a Manager.

The Emergency Evacuation Assembly Point is in the overflow car park located across the road from Dunedin House.

The allocated assembly point for the Council Chamber is: D2

Map of the Emergency Evacuation Assembly Point - the overflow car park:



All occupants must respond to the alarm signal by immediately initiating the evacuation procedure.

When the Alarm sounds:

1. **stop all activities immediately.** Even if you believe it is a false alarm or practice drill, you **MUST** follow procedures to evacuate the building fully.
2. **follow directional EXIT signs** to evacuate via the nearest safe exit in a calm and orderly manner.
 - do not stop to collect your belongings
 - close all doors as you leave
3. **steer clear of hazards.** If evacuation becomes difficult via a chosen route because of smoke, flames or a blockage, re-enter the Chamber (if safe to do so). Continue the evacuation via the nearest safe exit route.
4. **proceed to the Evacuation Assembly Point.** Move away from the building. Once you have exited the building, proceed to the main Evacuation Assembly Point **immediately** - located in the **East Overflow Car Park**.
 - do not assemble directly outside the building or on any main roadway, to ensure access for Emergency Services.

5. await further instructions.

- **do not re-enter the building under any circumstances without an “all clear”** which should only be given by the Incident Control Officer/Chief Fire Warden, Fire Warden or Manager.
- do not leave the area without permission.
- ensure all colleagues and visitors are accounted for. Notify a Fire Warden or Manager immediately if you have any concerns

Toilets

Toilets are located immediately outside the Council Chamber, accessed via the door at the back of the Chamber.

Water Cooler

A water cooler is available at the rear of the Council Chamber.

Microphones

During the meeting, members of the Committee, and officers in attendance, will have access to a microphone. Please use the microphones, when invited to speak by the Chair, to ensure you can be heard by the Committee and those in attendance at the meeting.

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People Select Committee

A meeting of People Select Committee was held on Monday 13th April 2026.

Present: Cllr Marilyn Surtees (Chair), Cllr Paul Weston (Vice-Chair), Cllr Nial Innes, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley and Cllr Barry Woodhouse

Officers: Ian Caley, Vanessa Housley (Children Services), Fallon Dunleavy (Regeneration & Inclusive Growth) Aisha Waithe, Junita Agyapong and Michelle Gunn (Corporate Services)

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr John Gardner and Cllr David Reynard

PEO/1/26 Evacuation Procedure

The Committee noted the evacuation and housekeeping procedure.

PEO/2/26 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

PEO/3/26 Minutes

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2026 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

PEO/4/26 Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Provision

The Committee received a presentation regarding the Post 16 Partnership Careers Strand from the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Careers Team Manager and Employment and Training Hub Manager. The presentation included:

- Careers activity in schools, which for the last 10 years had followed the Gatsby Benchmarks, with encounters with employers and employees and experiences of workplaces being particularly important. SBC's Careers Service had been asked to carry out a specific piece of work to identify demands and facilitate the sharing of best practice.
- Key priorities for schools and colleges and how SBC teams could assist. The Careers team and the Employment & Training Hub Team were working with Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), who were relaunching their Business Directory which included employers who engaged well with school aged young people, and would help schools to access this. TVCA were also offering advice, guidance, and coordination of accessing work experience placements for Key Stage 4 and the Careers Service would be working with them to ensure schools were receiving this information. A further priority for the Careers Network was to develop activities and toolkits for Key Stage 3 Work Experience Week. SBC would then consult with schools to choose whether to deliver this inhouse, teams across SBC including Careers and Employment & Training Hub to deliver it for

- them, or the SBC broker businesses to deliver it. The content for a parent and carer's guide to careers had been agreed and was in design and production stage.
- The work of the Employment & Training Hub in helping young people and to ensure they remained in education, employment or training. This included a range of initiatives that targeted young people at risk of disengaging and/or required support in identifying appropriate pathways for themselves. Key points highlighted were:
 - Since its launch in October, the Care Experience Recruitment Coordinator had supported over 50 young people and 27 of those had found employment.
 - The Youth Trailblazer was the only Trailblazer programme in the Tees Valley that was offering paid work experience.
 - The Skills for Success Programme, developed following school leaders raising concerns that students were struggling in a school environment and, while they were attending, their issues with anxiety and confidence meant they were not present. The industries involved in the initiative were generous with their time and knowledge and the activities were interactive. At the end of the course the students were aware of the industries and opportunities on their doorstep and their confidence had increase, with 100% stating they felt more confident. A celebration event was held, and students had to each give a pitch for themselves at the celebration. The programme had proven to improve behaviour as well their progress for English and Maths.
 - The Excellence for All Post 16 initiative was targeted to students who were not carrying on to university and did not know what their next step was. It focussed on personal skills such as time management and confidence, raising aspirations, and included study skills and revision session. The programme connected students with professionals from local industries and utilised social value hours that businesses may have had.
 - Careers Guidance in schools that included targeted support and universal support. Targeted support to young people in Year 11 was personalised and included 1:1 guidance, home visits, chase up via texts, etc. The Careers Service aimed to ensure that young people knew what they wanted to do after school by the end of February each year, and support was offered until they were settled in Year 12. The number of young people receiving targeted support was increasing and the supported needed more complex. Schools must provide universal support either inhouse, or via an external careers information advice and guidance provider, one of which was SBC's Careers Team. The Not in Education Employment of Training (NEET) rate for 16-18 years olds varied depending on who provided the guidance, with the rate being lower for those who received SBC's universal careers guidance. SBC's Career universal Guidance offer was a traded service and therefore had full cost recovery.
 - Career Guidance in colleges. All colleges had careers staff available for support, and SBC's Careers Service had Progression Advisers in colleges proactively offering support at the beginning and end of Year 12 when dropout rates were higher. They also offered support as and when requested. For colleges with higher rates of NEET, the Careers Service had a weekly presence which aimed to offer support as early as possible when issues where arising, such as declining attendance.
 - The increase in NEET, which was at 7.3% overall. There were national issues including attendance, mental health and a variety of factors impacting on school leavers not being ready to progress, however this did not explain the increase in

Stockton-on-Tees Borough. There had been a huge increase in the number of school leavers in the Borough and the provision of places had not kept pace. For example, 16/17 year-olds competing with 18/19 year-olds for apprenticeships, and employment opportunities, with the older cohort being more successful in gaining apprenticeships and jobs. Students were also more likely to choose the vocational course route, and while the Sixth Form Colleges were offering vocational as well as academic courses to try to meet the need, participation in learning at school sixth forms and sixth form colleges had dropped significantly in recent years. In addition, dropout rates were higher for vocational than academic courses. For those in employment, there had been an increase in this only being part-time rather than full-time employment. More students were asking for Maths and English courses, with colleges offering these as stand-alone courses and the Employment & Training Hub team, working with the Careers Team, had procured online provision which students welcomed and were well attended. The impact on NEET of additional staffing within Employment & Training Hub and the Care Leavers team for Care experienced young people had not yet been seen. Some impact on NEET for young people with SEN had been evidenced and Year 2 of the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer would include 16 and 17-year olds so it was anticipated that this would also impact upon NEET

Work experience was discussed, with members questioning if the health and safety and risk assessment requirements impacted on the ability to secure placements for young people. Officers noted that some schools had been paying outside providers to carry out the checks required however this was not necessary, as copies of the business's insurance was usually adequate. The Careers Team was working with TVCA to provide standardised advice and support to schools. Members further questioned the value and benefits of Key Stage 3 Work Experience Week and officers explained that the week was often split over the different year groups, e.g. two days each in Years 7, 8, and 9, which built upon each other and focused on the skills needed for different industries. The Key Stage 4 work experience week did not need to be a full week with the same employer, e.g. a young person may have a two-day placement and three days carrying out activities such as visiting different employers. It was the school's decision how they wished to arrange their provision, and some schools could target students who were uncertain of their career path to carry out a range of activities while other students with clear career goals could be given a week placement. Officers further noted that work experience was a useful tool in re-engaging students with students, explaining why they needed to focus at school.

Members asked if there were any issues with the turnover of career leaders in school. Officers explained that there was a national issue of careers leaders leaving the role, with a third changing each year, and this was despite careers leaders needing to complete specific training which took approximately one year. It was suggested that the budgets allocated to careers within schools was relatively small compared to other departments.

Members questioned the gender split for NEET and informed that it was 55/45 male/female. There was a small amount of Entry level students leaving courses to NEET, however the majority roughly divided into thirds who leave level 1, level 2 and level 3 provision. There was a further issue in that a sizable number of those students were not accessing the support they needed.

The pressures on Further Education were discussed with a member with teaching experience noting that the pay scales did not attract people within trades to teach, and

therefore the ratio of students to lecturers were higher. It was suggested that this impacted on the support students were receiving and therefore students were dropping out. There was also pressure to remove students who were not engaging from courses.

Officers noted that sharing the information on increased cohort via the Post 16 Partnership would aid providers to better prepare for larger applicant and learner numbers going forward.

The Senior Project Manager also presented information on the links between the Committees review and the Outcome Based Review (OBR) taking place regarding Opportunities for Young People into Employment (OYPE). The OYPE review would be considering how the systems and career support offer had changed in a five-year period and aimed to deliver a new service model, staffing structure options, savings proposal and operational redesign to better respond to NEET. The links between the two reviews were highlighted as follows:

- NEET reduction
- Improving awareness of local opportunities
- Strengthening transition, enhancing careers guidance

The OYPE review was at the discovery stage, where the context for the data and understanding of the issues would be considered, along with the outcomes of the wider Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Provision.

AGREED the information provided be noted.

PEO/5/26 Chair's Update and Work Programme 2026-27

Consideration was given to the Committee's work programme. It was noted that the Committees next Scrutiny Review had been agreed at Executive Scrutiny Committee and would be Procurement and Tendering Processes. The review would commence after the Committee completed its current review.

AGREED the work programme be noted.

Chair:

People Select Committee

11 May 2026

Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Provision

Summary

The final evidence gathering session for the Committee's review of Post 16 Provision will consider evidence from the Post 16 Partnership Transitions Working Group Strand.

Detail

1. As part of the scoping process for the Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Provision, the Committee identified representatives from the Post 16 Partnership Working Group Strands as key contributors. A representative from the Transitions Strand will therefore be attending the May meeting.
2. The representative has been asked to provide the following information:
 - Measures in place to prepare for transition to Post-16 education for all students
 - Number of out of borough students attending Post-16 providers in Stockton and reasons for their choice
3. A presentation prepared by the Transitions Lead is attached.
4. In addition, the analysis of a Post-16 Students survey carried out by the Transition Strand is attached, along with a copy of the agreed scope and project plan for the review for information.

Name of Contact Officer: [Michelle Gunn](#)

Post Title: [Scrutiny Officer](#)

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Email address: michelle.gunn@stockton.gov.uk

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Conyers School
& Sixth Form College



Post 16 Meeting

Transitions Group

People Select Committee on the 11th May



EGGLESCLIFFE SCHOOL
AND SIXTH FORM COLLEGE



Stockton-on-Tees
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Purpose

- ***To strengthen student retention and progression to Stockton-on-Tees POST 16 provision through improved planning, collaboration, and communication.***
- ***To understand the challenges faced by centres and how to best advise and guide students and parents based on a collective understanding from all Post 16 settings. Including those where 11-18 education can inform the group from both Pre and Post 16 views”***

Group met twice around other scheduled Post 16 meetings

- 21 October 2025
- 17 March 2026

Findings

Early Awareness is key

Findings that early advice and guidance helps...

- Work with schools to help parents better understand how GCSE outcomes (G Score) can link to post 16 progression
- The earlier this info is known the better, e.g.
 - Year 9 option choices can impact future pathways
 - We agreed that there is a need consistent messaging between schools and colleges

Student Choice & Retention influences

- Friendship groups
- Travel time and ease of access
- Some students return to local providers
- Agreement to collect data via research at all SBC colleges to better understand the influences better.

Supporting Vulnerable Learners

- Stockton Council's Transitions Team has introduced person-centred planning from age 14 for students with EHCPs and those involved with social care.
- The Preparing for Adulthood (PFA) Day was highlighted as a strong example of effective multi-agency working.
- However, challenges remain, including the late identification of non-attenders and inconsistent use of application systems.
- The group agreed to work collaboratively to strengthen support and improve processes in these areas.

Data & Communication

- Greater clarity between schools and colleges will help to ‘land’ student better in post 16 colleges – work is underway to ensure this happens
- GDPR can be a concern and some students want a ‘fresh start’.
- Work to secure borough-wide data framework using both school and college data management systems
- Best way to support all students but especially, vulnerable learners

Post-16 Transitions Survey – Key Findings

College / Sixth Form	Number of Responses 340
Egglescliffe Sixth Form	139
Bede Sixth Form College (Billingham)	128
Stockton Sixth Form College	52
Conyers Sixth Form	21

- Sample shows that 83% of students are from Stockton Borough and remain in local provision
- **Open events matter:**
 - 73% attended open evenings
 - 71% attended taster sessions
- **Transport is critical:** 82% said travel influenced their decision
- **Cross-borough consideration:** ~37% considered studying outside the borough, but most stayed local
- **Key decision drivers:**
 - Accessibility and transport convenience
 - Quality of open events and engagement
 - Strength of local post-16 offer
- **Key Insight:**
 - Local provision remains competitive, but transport and early engagement are decisive factors in student choice.

Curriculum & Clarity

- It is agreed that there is a wide range of opportunities for younger learners and our offer is strong with all providers Outstanding and Good (last OFSETD inspections) – note new framework and scorecard in place from Sept 2026
- Outcomes in the Borough are complete and while this is clearly a benefit, this can also create challenges as the choice can be confusing for both pupils and parents
- Academic ‘jargon’ that can confuse learners and families
- Proposal for central ‘jargon buster’ resource agreed that can simplify the process

Events & Engagement

- Plans are in place for borough-wide careers/education in September 2026 – The Globe is the preferred venue
- Year 9–10 will be targeted as well as Y11 students and families (note - Year 10 events held at all colleges)
- The Borough Council is piloting work experience programme throughout the borough to comply with the new legislation around WEX

Outcomes to date

- Footfall at open events is significantly increasing on all sites
- Applications for the coming 26/27 year are again showing a positive trajectory
- Work ongoing on all sites to secure conversion
- Careers team sharing cross borough data on NEETS to ensure all students without destinations have best chance to secure positive outcomes

Any questions?

Transitions Survey Summary - Analysis of Stockton Borough Post-16 Student Survey Data

The survey provided an insight into the factors influencing students' decisions when selecting a post-16 provider within and around the Stockton Borough. A total of 340 responses were analysed, offering a useful sample of current student experiences and decision-making processes by site

Summary by site

Student Responses by Site	
College / Sixth Form	Number of Responses
Egglescliffe Sixth Form	139
Bede Sixth Form College (Billingham)	128
Stockton Sixth Form College	52
Conyers Sixth Form	21

Findings

A significant number of respondents (around 83%) reported that their home postcode is within Stockton Borough Council, indicating that most students attending local post-16 institutions originate from the borough itself. This suggests that the borough's post-16 provision continues to serve primarily local demand and that students generally remain within their local authority area when progressing from secondary to further education.

Importance of Open Events

Engagement with open evenings and recruitment events appears to play a substantial role in influencing student choice. Approximately 73% of respondents attended an open evening, while around 71% attended taster sessions before making their final decision. These figures demonstrate the importance of pre-enrolment engagement activities in supporting students' decision-making. Open events and subject tasters clearly provide valuable opportunities for prospective students to experience the college environment, explore facilities and interact with teaching staff.

Studying outside of the Borough

The data also highlights that although many students stay within the borough, a considerable proportion (around 37%) considered studying outside Stockton, such as at neighbouring providers in areas like Middlesbrough. However, the majority ultimately chose to remain within the borough. This suggests that local colleges remain competitive, though cross-borough competition for students remains a factor within the wider Tees Valley post-16 landscape.

Transport

Transport emerges as one of the most influential factors affecting students' decisions. Approximately 82% of respondents indicated that transport played a role in their college choice. This demonstrates the importance of accessibility and travel convenience when students and families evaluate post-16 options. Reliable transport links, particularly bus routes and commuting times, appear to be a key practical consideration alongside academic provision and campus experience.

Key Drivers

Overall, the data indicates that three key drivers influence post-16 choice within Stockton Borough:

1. Accessibility and transport convenience
2. Positive engagement through open evenings and taster sessions
3. The availability of attractive local post-16 provision

While competition from neighbouring boroughs exists, most students sampled ultimately choose to study within Stockton, particularly when local colleges provide strong engagement opportunities and are accessible through convenient transport routes. The findings reinforce the importance of continuing to invest in recruitment events, strengthening transport accessibility, and ensuring that information about local post-16 opportunities is clearly communicated to students and families.

Next steps

Whilst this sample provides an overview of students already studying within the borough, a fuller picture would be gained by also analysing the choices of students who progress to providers outside of the Stockton Borough Council postcode area. Further insight could be obtained through engagement with local schools and reviewing their progression data, or by working with relevant council teams to develop a more accurate understanding of the decisions students make at age 16.

Post 16 Transitions Group

16.03.26

People Select Committee
Review of Post 16 Education
Outline Scope

Scrutiny Chair (Project Director): Marilyn Surtees Paul Weston (vice chair)	Contact details: m.surtees@stockton.gov.uk paul.weston@stockton.gov.uk
Scrutiny Officer (Project Manager): Michelle Gunn	Contact details: Michelle.gunn@stockton.gov.uk
Departmental Link Officer: Vanessa Housley	Contact details: Vanessa.housley@stockton.gov.uk
PMO Aishah Waithe	Contact details: Aishah.waithe@stockton.gov.uk

Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

The topic of Post 16 Education directly addresses Priority one: The best start in life to achieve big ambitions Key Move Giving children and young people the best possible start, in an inclusive community where everyone can thrive, as it includes the action to work with Schools and Post-16 providers to increase the number of children and young people in Education, Employment and Training at ages 16 – 18 years, helping to grow their ambitions and meeting the needs of local employers.

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

There is a strong Post 16 offer in Stockton-on-Tees, with five providers offering a range of courses and qualifications to fulfil a variety of different passions and career aspirations. Achievement for young people at the end of their Post 16 Education is growing rapidly with a higher than national average A Level pass rate across the Borough of 97.7%.

However, enrolment figures for in Borough providers have been impacted in recent years with more Stockton-on-Tees students choosing to attend out of Borough providers in Middlesborough and Darlington, who offer similar courses. Only one out of Borough provider beats In Borough A Level A*-B outcomes.

A survey of Young People approaching the end of Year 11 by the Careers team, asking about their readiness for leaving school, found that 13.1% of students had not had a careers discussion at all in advance of sitting their GCSEs. A further 18.1% of students surveyed said they had not made a clear decision about their next steps after school. These findings suggest that Stockton students are largely unaware of the current offer available to them and improvements are needed to the existing communications strategy to effectively reach the providers target audience.

While the number of students completing Post 16 Education is growing, with an increase of over 300 students over 5 years, statistics show that a small minority of 16-17 year olds in the Borough are at risk of or have become NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) since beginning

Key Stage 5. Economic inactivity significantly impacts upon an individual's economic growth potential and is often associated with an increased likelihood of involvement in antisocial behaviour and crime. During the 2022/23 academic year, 1.6% more students who attended a Post 16 provider IN BOROUGH (5.3%) dropped out in Year 12 than those OUT OF BOROUGH (3.7%) Overall, 7% of our Year 13 students, whether they attended a Post 16 provider in or out of Borough were NEET by the end of November 2024. These numbers are much too high.

A minority of students choose to dropout within the first three months of starting a Post 16 qualification, therefore a core focus of the Post 16 enrichment strategy is to improve transitional support. Post 16 education involves an increase in independence, greater difficulty of work and a new structure to the day. These factors are often responsible for dropouts, but it is also important to consider other external factors such as health and wellbeing, financial situation, and access to transport. Transition from secondary school to Post 16 education need to be as seamless as possible, helping Young People to overcome some of these factors and avoid becoming NEET.

Therefore, areas that would benefit from development include:

- Attraction & Retention rates
- Current NEET statistics
- Internal awareness of strategic funding opportunities
- Communication & Marketing of our offer

The review aims to consider the current position, challenges, and proposed solutions in the Stockton-on-Tees post 16 provision. This will inform the Post 16 enrichment strategy currently in development.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

- How well are stakeholders collaborating to minimise any challenges?
- What careers advice do school leavers receive prior to applying for courses/apprenticeships?
- How do school leavers find out about post-16 providers and courses available?
- What extra-curriculum activities do post-16 providers provide and how are these marketed?
- Are there any extra benefits that can be offered to school leavers by post-16 providers?
- What pastoral arrangements are in place at post-16 provisions?
- What financial support is available for school leavers to apply for?
- Which courses/providers are young people dropping out from?

Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work?

Cabinet, Council, local schools, colleges and training providers, and young people of the borough

<p>Expected duration of review and key milestones:</p> <p>Eight months (reporting to Cabinet in September 2026)</p> <p>Approve scope and project plan – January 2026 Receive evidence – February 2026 – May 2026 Draft recommendations – June 2026 Final report – July 2026 Report to Cabinet – September 2026</p>
<p>What information do we need?</p> <p>Existing information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc.):</p> <p>Partnership Strategic Aims (Word and PowerPoint documents) Current strategy/draft strategy Current Post 16 brochure List of courses available Children and Young People Scrutiny Review of Careers Provision 2020</p> <p>New information: Views of Partnership members Views of school leavers / findings from consultations carried out by careers service and Partnership Comparisons with the offer of providers from other Local Authority areas</p>

Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet Member, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc.)	What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?
Council Officers	Introductory presentation
Post 16 Strategic Board Working Strand Lead – Excellence for All	Collaboration to drive further improvement in outcomes Engagement with local businesses Pastoral arrangements within providers Extra-curricular activities and opportunities provided Funding/benefit advice available from providers
Post 16 Strategic Board Working Strand Lead – Communications and Marketing	Joint messaging to strengthen communication of Stockton’s collective Post 16 offer When and how providers market their courses to school leavers The relationships between Bede, Stockton Riverside and Stockton Sixth Form colleges and local schools

<p>Post 16 Strategic Board Working Strand Lead – Careers</p>	<p>Collaboration with Stockton’s Careers Leaders Early intervention with students at risk of disengaging – Skills for Success Careers advice available both within schools and within post-16 provision Relationship with local businesses</p>
<p>Post 16 Strategic Board Working Strand Lead – Transitions</p>	<p>Measures in place to prepare for transition to post 16 education for all students Reasons why young people may become NEET</p>
<p>School leavers/students and their parents/carers</p>	<p>Their main priorities when choosing post 16 education The support they need to attend post 16 education Reasons why they may not continue with a course</p>
<p>How will this information be gathered? (e.g. financial baselining and analysis, benchmarking, site visits, face-to-face questioning, telephone survey, survey)</p> <p>Committee meetings, attendance at partnership meeting, reports, desk-based research, focus group</p>	
<p>How will key partners and the public be involved in the review?</p> <p>Committee meetings, information submissions, focus group of service users</p>	
<p>How will the review help the Council meet the Public Sector Equality Duty?</p> <p>The Equality Act 2010 protects everyone from discrimination on grounds of nine Protected Characteristics (including – but not limited to – age, gender, disability, ethnicity), and advance equality of opportunity for those with Protected Characteristics.</p> <p>Public bodies must have due regard for advancing equality which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics • taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people <p>The review will contribute towards meeting the Council’s requirements under this Duty by reviewing the provision, and barriers to education, for all.</p>	
<p>How will the review contribute towards the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, or the implementation of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy?</p> <p>The review will contribute to Focus Area 1 of the JSNA: All children and families have the best start in life as it will Post-16 Education will affect the Commitment of Transition: ensure there is a joined-up pathway that fully supports young people in their transition to adulthood. Ensuring that young people have access to good quality education and training after leaving school will give them the qualifications and skills that they need in the future to gain employment and begin their careers.</p>	

Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:

In considering the challenges and proposed solution to the current Post 16 offer the review will aim to assist in increasing attraction and retention of post-16 education, reduce the number of young people becoming NEET, and lead to better outcomes for the young people of the Borough.

Project Plan

Key Task	Details/Activities	Date	Responsibility
Scoping of Review	Information gathering	November/December	Scrutiny Officer Link Officer
Tri-Partite Meeting	Meeting to discuss aims and objectives of review	02.12.25	Select Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Cabinet Member(s), Director(s), Scrutiny Officer, Link Officer
Agree Project Plan	Scope and Project Plan agreed by Committee	05.01.26	Select Committee
Publicity of Review	Determine whether Communications Plan needed		Link Officer, Scrutiny Officer
Obtaining Evidence	Working Group Lead for: Excellence for all Communication and marketing Careers Transition Focus groups: students; parent/carers; stakeholders Attendance at Partnership meeting	02.02.26 02.03.26 13.04.26 11.05.26 TBC 20.04.26	Select Committee
Members decide recommendations and findings	Review summary of findings and formulate draft recommendations	8.06.26	Select Committee
Circulate Draft Report to Stakeholders	Circulation of Report	June 26	Scrutiny Officer
Tri-Partite Meeting	Meeting to discuss findings of review and draft recommendations	TBC	Select Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Cabinet Member(s), Director(s), Scrutiny Officer, Link Officer
Final Agreement of Report	Approval of final report by Committee	06.07.26	Select Committee, Cabinet Member, Director
Consideration of Report by Executive Scrutiny Committee	Consideration of report	21.07.26 or 22.09.26	Executive Scrutiny Committee
Report to Cabinet/Approving Body	Presentation of final report with recommendations for approval to Cabinet	17.09.26	Cabinet / Approving Body

Progress Update for Agreed Recommendations – Review of Disabled Facilities Grants

Summary

Members are asked to consider the evidence and assessments of progress contained within the attached Progress Update on the implementation of previously agreed recommendations in relation to the review of Disabled Facilities Grants for access to the final report, please see [Final Report - Scrutiny Review of Disabled Facilities Grant.pdf](#)

Detail

1. Following the Cabinet consideration of scrutiny reports, accepted recommendations are then subject to a monitoring process to track their implementation.
2. Two main types of report are used. Initially this is by means of Action Plans detailing how services will be taking forward agreed recommendations. This is then followed by a Progress Update report approximately 12 months after the relevant Select Committee has agreed the Action Plan. Evidence is submitted by the relevant department together with an assessment of progress against all recommendations. Should members of the Select Committee agree, those recommendations which have reached an assessment of '1' are then signed off as having been completed.
3. If any recommendations remain incomplete, or if the Select Committee does not agree with the view on progress, the Select Committee may ask for a further update.
4. The assessment of progress for each recommendation should be categorised as follows:

1	Achieved (Fully)	The evidence provided shows that the recommendation has been fully implemented within the timescale specified.
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2	On Track (but not yet due for completion)	The evidence provided shows that implementation of the recommendation is on track but the timescale specified has not expired.
3	Slipped	<p>The evidence shows that progress on implementation has slipped.</p> <p>An anticipated date by which the recommendation is expected to become achieved should be advised and the reasons for the delay.</p>
4	Not Achieved	<p>The evidence provided shows that the recommendation has not been fully achieved.</p> <p>An explanation for non-achievement of the recommendation would be provided.</p>

5. To further strengthen the monitoring process, from August 2020, the Progress Update report will also include references on the evidence of impact for each recommendation.
6. For progress update reports following the completion of a review, the relevant Link Officer(s) will be in attendance.
7. **Appendix 1** (Review of Disabled Facilities Grants) sets out the outstanding recommendations for this Committee. Members are asked to review the update and indicate whether they agree with the assessments of progress.

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APPENDIX 1
PROGRESS UPDATE: Review of Disabled Facilities Grants

SCRUTINY MONITORING – PROGRESS UPDATE	
Review:	Disabled Facilities Grants
Link Officer/s:	Sam Dixon
Action Plan Agreed:	April 2025

Updates on the progress of actions in relation to agreed recommendations from previous scrutiny reviews are required approximately 12 months after the relevant Select Committee has agreed the Action Plan. Progress updates must be detailed, evidencing what has taken place regarding each recommendation – a grade assessing progress should then be given (see end of document for grading explanation). Any evidence on the impact of the actions undertaken should also be recorded for each recommendation.

Recommendation 3:	Housing Investment & Migration Support team work with Planning to explore building upon the requirements for accessibility/adaptability in new build properties when the Local Plan is next updated and, prior to this, lobby government to make the relevant Building Regulations mandatory.
Responsibility:	Sam Dixon & Simon Grundy
Date:	July 2025
Agreed Action:	Internal Meeting with Planning
Agreed Success Measure:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of current policies and whether any changes can be implemented • Letter to be sent to central government
Evidence of Progress (November 2025):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions ongoing in line with updating Local Plan however this may be a number of years before this may come into effect
Assessment of Progress (November 2025): (include explanation if required)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Track
Evidence of Impact (November 2025):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings ongoing
Evidence of Progress (May 2026):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions ongoing in line with updating Local Plan however this may be a number of years before this may come into effect
Assessment of Progress (May 2026):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Track

APPENDIX 1

PROGRESS UPDATE: Review of Disabled Facilities Grants

(include explanation if required)	
Evidence of Impact (May 2026):	

Recommendation 4:	The Leader and Chief Executive support officers in their ongoing discussions with Registered Provider's to explore their current and future plans for adaptations and also explore joint working to support Registered Providers to take up their responsibility, to ease pressure on the waiting list.
Responsibility:	Jane Edmends
Date:	June for Thirteen
Agreed Action:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with Thirteen – Initial meetings with Thirteen (as the main RP in Stockton) have taken place at an Assistant Director level and are progressing positively. Future meetings scheduled with Thirteen to ensure discussions continue to move forward positively. • Meet with all other RP's
Agreed Success Measure:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of each of the RP's adaptation policy • Understanding of which adaptations each RP will undertake themselves
Evidence of Progress (November 2025):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thirteen meetings drawing to a close • Meetings with other RP's to follow
Assessment of Progress (November 2025): (include explanation if required)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Track
Evidence of Impact (November 2025):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separate report attached
Evidence of Progress (May 2026):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process nearly agreed with Thirteen • Discussions taken place with North Star and Accent • Pilot put in place with North Star
Assessment of Progress (May 2026): (include explanation if required)	Slipped
Evidence of Impact (May 2026):	

Recommendation 5:	Officers explore with Registered Providers a register of adapted properties within the Borough which details the type of adaptations, to assist the Nomination and Lettings Team in
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PROGRESS UPDATE: Review of Disabled Facilities Grants

	advertising and matching individuals with appropriate properties.
Responsibility:	Jane Edmends
Date:	June 2025 for Thirteen October 2025 for other RP's
Agreed Action:	Meet with RP's – tied into 4 above, this discussion will take place with all RPs to see if they would share this information with the Council we can explore the potential of a setting up a register.
Agreed Measure:	Success <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with all RP's • Interest from RP's
Evidence of Progress (November 2025):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relates to recommendation 4 above • Thirteen conversation's progressing first as they are the largest RP in Stockton • Other RP discussion will follow
Assessment of Progress (November 2025): (include explanation if required)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Track
Evidence of Impact (November 2025):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings held with Thirteen and are progressing well
Evidence of Progress (May 2026):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relates to above recommendation • Have started a database of DFG completions from 25/26 • Still need to hold further discussions with other RP's as to whether they will share this information with us
Assessment of Progress (May 2026): (include explanation if required)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slipped (due to discussions taking longer with Thirteen)
Evidence of Impact (May 2026):	
Recommendation 6:	<p>Communication to residents and applicants be improved by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reviewing and updating information on SBC website and explore whether the Foundations template and link to adaptmyhome.com will give residents sufficient information to decide whether to apply for an assessment/DFG.

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PROGRESS UPDATE: Review of Disabled Facilities Grants

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - exploring introducing a system to ensure clear and consistent communications to keep applicants informed of their position in the process at regular intervals to reduce misunderstandings and manage expectations. - sharing key information of DFG scheme available with external stakeholders to ensure potential applicants are aware of support available. - ensuring an appropriate route for residents to communicate with the Housing Investment & Migration Support team is in place. - a singular customer feedback survey covering all processes and services involved in a DFG is developed, to ensure this is only collected once.
Responsibility:	Sam Dixon
Date:	April – June 2025
Agreed Action:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak to SBC Digital Team • Review current letters and look to see how these can be improved – Leaflets for customers produced to show where they are in within the DFG process and updated letters drafted so they can be informed every 3-6 months. These leaflets have been provided to the Parents and Carers Forum and initial feedback has been received. • Engage with External Agencies – engage initially with Parent and Carers forum to get an initial steer on where to start • Review current resident contact information and pathway • Produce Single Customer Feedback form – New feedback form current under construction and can be shared with Committee
Agreed Measure:	<p style="text-align: center;">Success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFG Form available online • Letters updated • Information sent to customers 3-6 monthly • Wider public knowledge of DFG • New pathway established for residents • New form so residents only have to complete one form for the whole DFG process
Evidence of Progress (November 2025):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion still ongoing to enable DFG to be complete online • Letters updated April 2025 • Customers updated every 3 months from April 2025 • Pathway established for residents which shows where they are in the process and the time they are expected to wait in each stage

APPENDIX 1 PROGRESS UPDATE: Review of Disabled Facilities Grants

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFG Application forms simplified in April 2025
Assessment of Progress (November 2025): (include explanation if required)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Track
Evidence of Impact (November 2025):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers aware at the very start of the process and are updated every 3 months • Reduction in complaints
Evidence of Progress (May 2026):	All achieved apart from DFG Form online
Assessment of Progress (May 2026): (include explanation if required)	Still working with Digital team to get DFG online
Evidence of Impact (May 2026):	

Recommendation 7:	<p>Officers explore streamlining processes to understand their impact and benefit of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - referral form used by the Occupational Therapy Team be reviewed to ensure it captures all relevant information to enabled to make a decision on eligible works. - removing the requirement for Occupational Therapist to approve the scheme of works for straightforward cases - allowing electronic forms to be uploaded - requiring only two quotes rather than three for the application
Responsibility:	Sam Dixon
Date:	April – June 2025
Agreed Action:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral form to be reviewed – Referral form has been reviewed and updated and share with OT colleagues for comment • Investigate whether this would be possible • Engage with SBC internal Digital Team • Review with Procurement team
Agreed Measure:	<p>Success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated Referral Form • Removal or review of current process • Introduction of new Digital form • Acceptance that 2 quotes is acceptable

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PROGRESS UPDATE: Review of Disabled Facilities Grants

Evidence of Progress (November 2025):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Referral Form Updated April 2025 Current DFG software package due to expire, currently exploring with the Digital team a new software package which has been specifically built for DFG's via Foundations Looking at an 'away day' with the OT Team and Housing Investment to share understand and confirm the DFG process – potentially Jan 2026 Procurement
Assessment of Progress (November 2025): (include explanation if required)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On Track
Evidence of Impact (November 2025):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New software potentially to go live Jan 2026 whereby OT's will be able to input referral's directly into this system
Evidence of Progress (May 2026):	New software potentially to go live September 2026 whereby OT's will be able to input referral's directly into this system
Assessment of Progress (May 2026): (include explanation if required)	On Track
Evidence of Impact (May 2026):	

Recommendation 8:	Further examination of if/how the Home Improvement Agency can be utilised to provide early help and prevention, to ease budgetary pressure for DFG
Responsibility:	Sam Dixon
Date:	August 2025
Agreed Action:	Engage with HIA team to explore options available
Agreed Success Measure:	HIA able to complement DFG
Evidence of Progress (November 2025):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OT now sits in First Contact so is actively reviewing and distributing resident requests therefore quickening up the referral process, providing DFG / HIA advice and waiting times right at the beginning of the process to ensure expectations are handled right from the start.
Assessment of Progress (November 2025):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On Track

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(include explanation if required)	
Evidence of Impact (November 2025):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OT Team Managers do not have to filter referrals themselves, and this is being done by the OT in First Contact
Evidence of Progress (May 2026):	All Achieved
Assessment of Progress (May 2026): (include explanation if required)	Achieved
Evidence of Impact (May 2026):	

Recommendation 9:	Use of flat pack extensions is explored in more detail to see if they would provide a viable and cost-effective option.
Responsibility:	Sam Dixon
Date:	July 2025
Agreed Action:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with flat pack providers Engage with Planning and Building Control
Agreed Success Measure:	Whether viable or not
Evidence of Progress (November 2025):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is being discussed on the back of the Local Plan update however planning and building control need specific construction and material information to advise whether this would be acceptable Foundations have recently covered this subject during at one of their seminars in Birmingham
Assessment of Progress (November 2025): (include explanation if required)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slipped
Evidence of Impact (November 2025):	
Evidence of Progress (May 2026):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New company has come to the market end of March 2026 (presented at a recent DFG Foundations Roadshow) providing extensions which can be installed within 5 days.

APPENDIX 1 PROGRESS UPDATE: Review of Disabled Facilities Grants

	Awaiting material and construction information from them so this can be shared with planning and building control
Assessment of Progress (May 2026): (include explanation if required)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On Track
Evidence of Impact (May 2026):	

Recommendation 10:	Following correspondence from the Royal British Legion to the Council, officers review whether it is possible for military compensation to be exempt from the means test for DFG's and report back
Responsibility:	Sam Dixon
Date:	June 2025
Agreed Action:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feed into overall arching request of Council - Jonanthan Nertney is leading on a council wide request for this to be exempt from all SBC means tests Review previous Data- currently looking at previous years data to see how many residents
Agreed Success Measure:	Review of current and council wide policies
Evidence of Progress (November 2025):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information showed that over the past 3 years we did not have anybody that this affected DFG wise Therefore, changing this would have a minimal impact on DFG delivery. OT referral form updated to include whether a client is a current serviceperson or a veterans so this can be picked up early in the process Council wide change so waiting for final sign off
Assessment of Progress (November 2025): (include explanation if required)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On Track
Evidence of Impact (November 2025):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring in place from DFG aspect Council wide change so awaiting final sign off
Evidence of Progress (May 2026):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awaiting final sign off achieved other than this
Assessment of Progress (May 2026):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieved for DFG

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(include explanation if required)	
Evidence of Impact (May 2026):	

Assessment of Progress Gradings:	1 Fully Achieved	2 On-Track	3 Slipped	4 Not Achieved
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REPORT TO PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

11 MAY 2026

Overview Report: Corporate Services and Revenues, Benefits and Welfare Services

Summary

The Committee will receive overview reports from the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Corporate Services Directorate, and Revenues, Benefits and Welfare Services which provides details of key achievements and challenges in 2025-26 as well as any emerging issues within these areas of Council activity.

Detail

1. In 2025, to facilitate the important overview function of scrutiny committees and provide the opportunity to hold SBC Cabinet Members and services to account, a decision was made to resume overview and performance reporting to the Council's Select Committees. It was agreed that this should take place twice-yearly.
2. The reporting of performance measures will not commence until September / October 2026, therefore this initial overview-only update will focus on key achievements and challenges for Council services during 2025-2026, along with any emerging issues that relevant scrutiny committees need to be aware of.
3. A report has been provided in advance and is included within these meeting papers. The SBC Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport, the SBC Director for Corporate Services, the SBC Assistant Director – People and Organisational Development SBC, and the Assistant Director – Revenues, Benefits & Welfare are scheduled to be in attendance to provide a summary and address any Member comments / questions.
4. At this meeting, officers from the SBC Strategic Planning Team are also due to provide an update on how the performance information will be presented from the September / October 2026 cycle onward.

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**REPORT TO PEOPLE SELECT
COMMITTEE**

11 MAY 2026

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF
CORPORATE SERVICES**

Corporate Services Performance Report 2025/26

Summary

This report provides People Select Committee with an overview of the performance and operating position of the Corporate Services Directorate during 2025/26. Its purpose is to support effective scrutiny by the committee by setting out whether the Council's core corporate services functions remain sound; sets out where pressures are emerging; and describes what this means for resilience

This report covers those functions within the Corporate Services Directorate. It excludes Xentrall which is reported separately through its governance arrangements.

Recommendations

1. Members are recommended to note the report and provide feedback and scrutiny challenge on the contents.

Overview

1. Members will recognise that Corporate Services is an essential part of the Council's overall corporate control system. The work of the directorate underpins lawful decision making, democratic accountability, workforce, governance, procurement and assurance, legal compliance, information governance, communications, programme oversight and the corporate systems that enable frontline services to operate effectively.
2. Looking back at the overall position for 2025/26 the corporate control environment remains fundamentally sound and effective. However, it is operating under increasing pressure in a number of demand driven areas, particularly those linked to our frontline services Children's Services and workforce capacity.
3. Core governance processes remain stable. Democratic and constitutional processes have been delivered to time throughout the year, procurement governance remains controlled and transparent, and statutory information governance compliance remains high. Internal audit provides a positive overall assurance rating with no evidence of systemic control failure.

4. At the same time, demand on these core services has increased, this can be seen particularly at some of the key statutory interfaces we have with our residents. For example Data Subject Access Requests have increased by over 92% largely linked to Children's Services related cases. Legal Services has experienced pressure in care related work, while maintaining strong performance in all other areas.
5. Workforce indicators show tightening resilience. Members will note that mental health related absence (across the council) has continued to rise and directorate turnover stands at 8.1% year to date.
6. These pressures reflect services that are continuing to function effectively, but within a challenging resource position. The key issue for Members is therefore sustainability and capacity over the medium term to longer term.

Corporate Governance and Democratic Functions

7. The Council's democratic and corporate governance infrastructure remains robust. All Democratic Services indicators are delivered at 100% compliance, including publication of agendas, Cabinet decision records, public questions, Member questions and motions within statutory and constitutional timescales. Voter registration levels remain in the period remained high.
8. Procurement governance remains disciplined and improvements of the robustness of decision making has been made through the utilisation of a procurement governance group to provide additional check and challenge to decision making.
9. Statutory transparency requirements continue to be met. Freedom of Information compliance remains high.

Performance Across Corporate Services

10. Across the Directorate, performance remains consistent with a system that is functioning effectively.
11. Democratic services, electoral services, procurement governance and policy oversight are all being delivered in line with expectations. Social value delivered through procurement activity now exceeds £7 million cumulatively, recognising that some values are reported after the end of the accounting period.
12. Council Plan and Service Plan priorities supported by Corporate Services remain On Track, with programme governance arrangements operating as intended.
13. There is no evidence unmanaged risk at a corporate level.

Workforce and Capacity

14. Workforce indicators provide the clearest signal of emerging pressure.
15. Sickness within Corporate Services remains below the Council average of 8 days per full time equivalent, providing short term operational assurance. However, sickness is cumulative across the year, and mental health related absence has risen continuing a clear upward trend.

16. Directorate turnover stands at 8.1% year to date, compared with a Council average of 6.7%, suggesting pressure on retention in specialist and assurance critical roles.
17. Learning and development indicators remain positive. Compliance with mandatory training for data protection and cyber security remains high. However, completion of information governance training remains an identified issue council wide and continues to require targeted management focus.
18. Overall, the Directorate continues to deliver, but workforce resilience is a clear concern and requires active management.

Legal and Governance Pressures

19. Legal Services continues to support high risk statutory activity across safeguarding, care proceedings, education, prosecutions, contracts and governance.
20. Performance pressure is concentrated in Children's Social Care related care proceedings. Year to date, 38% of care proceedings were issued within the two week target timescale. Performance varies between quarters rather than showing consistent deterioration.
21. The causes of delay are clear and consistent: evidential readiness and quality, amendments required prior to filing, prioritisation of urgent safeguarding cases, and limited specialist legal capacity.
22. Performance elsewhere in Legal Services remains strong. For example all prosecution cases are issued to time once ready to proceed.
23. This demonstrates that Legal Services is prioritising statutory risk appropriately. The challenge sits primarily at the interface with Children's Services demand.
24. Investment has been made available for this area in the budget for 2026/27

Information Governance and Complaints

25. Information governance and complaints data provide a clear indicator of demand driven pressure. Common themes council wide include communication and information sharing. Data Subject Access Requests increased sharply, showing increases of over, representing a 92% increase. The majority of requests relate to Children's Services cases and are complex and resource intensive.
26. Freedom of Information compliance remains strong.
27. These trends reflect increased statutory demand and complexity. The key risks relate to capacity, timeliness and the ability to translate learning from complaints and DSARs into service improvement.

Communications

28. The Communications function continues to provide effective support to organisational engagement and reputation.

29. The My Council newsletter reaches tens of thousands of residents, and social media audiences remain substantial, including over 40,000 Facebook followers, around 12,500 on LinkedIn, and more than 7,000 on Instagram.
30. Engagement levels fluctuate across the year, reflecting external factors and campaign activity rather than decline. Work has been undertaken to refresh the Communications approach and planning to improve consistency and alignment with Council Plan priorities.
31. No governance or compliance concerns are identified in this area.

Policy Development, Public Affairs and Programme Management Office

32. Policy Development and Public Affairs, including the Programme Management Office, supports delivery of the Council Plan and provides governance oversight of major programmes.
33. Programme governance arrangements are established and functioning, supporting risk management, delivery tracking and benefits realisation. All reported priorities remain On Track.
34. The emerging challenge relates to delivery capacity, particularly where corporate programmes intersect with areas already experiencing service pressure.

Risk and Improvement Priorities

35. The evidence across the Directorate points to a consistent and targeted set of priorities:
 - managing demand pressures particularly in legal services linked to Children's Services.
 - strengthening workforce resilience and retention.
 - embedding learning from complaints and DSARs; and
 - maintaining stability across core corporate systems.

Next Steps for 2026/27

36. Looking ahead, the key challenge is sustainability. The Directorate will need to maintain strong corporate controls while operating within tightening resources, managing continued demand growth and supporting workforce resilience. The trajectory remains manageable but will require continued management attention and clear prioritisation.
37. Members can take assurance that Corporate Services continues to operate effectively as a key component of the Council's corporate control framework. Statutory and governance responsibilities are being met, and there is no evidence of systemic failures. The pressures identified are real but concentrated. They are driven primarily by Children's Services demand and workforce capacity. Corporate Services remains stable and effective as a key element of the Council's corporate assurance framework. However, increasing demand and workforce pressures mean that capacity, resilience and targeted improvement must remain active management priorities to sustain this position over the medium term.

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REPORT TO PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

11 MAY 2026

REPORT OF CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

Revenues, Benefits and Welfare Overview Report

Summary

This report gives an overview of the key achievements and challenges in 2025/6 for the Revenues, Benefits and Welfare Service.

Key Achievements

1. The ongoing administration of 91,300 council tax properties, 5,900 business rate properties, 4,100 housing benefit claims and 15,600 council tax support claims.
2. We have completed a range of reviews to ensure our council tax and business rate records are accurate and income for the Council is maximised:
 - a. 570 new property inspections, reporting completed properties to the Valuation Office Agency for valuation banding resulting in an increase of £0.4m to our council tax base.
 - b. Reviewed over 1,000 households in receipt of council tax single occupier discount, removing the discount and issuing penalties when the council tax payer had failed to inform us of a change.
 - c. 440 council tax properties categorised as unoccupied have been reviewed, and updated to reflect changes that have occurred.
 - d. Reviewed over 2,000 business properties in receipt of Small Business Rate Relief, and eligibility updated where appropriate.
3. We have introduced a more secure method for council tax payers to access electronic bills, replacing emailed bills with an online portal. Uptake continues to increase, and 54,000 (59.5%) households are now signed up to the online portal.

4. Led the design and implementation of a North East Council Tax Care Leavers Scheme, establishing a reciprocal agreement across all 12 North East Local Authorities to 'exempt' eligible care leavers from council tax charges until the age of 25.
5. Undertaken a Powering our Future Transformation Review of how we collect council income, resulting in a corporate debt strategy and the creation of a centralised income collection team responsible for the collection of all unpaid council debt.
6. Implemented debt profiling software within council tax collection processes to fast-track recovery where appropriate, identifying and providing support to those at financial risk.
7. Strengthened fraud prevention and detection by reviewing 1,800 Housing Benefit claims to ensure changes in circumstances are reflected in the Housing Benefit award and supporting the National Fraud Initiative by reviewing council tax single person discount data matched with the Electoral Register.
8. Completed the Powering our Future Transformation Review of Welfare Support, introducing a tiered delivery model that prioritises self-serve, maximises nil-cost support and provides specialist assistance when needed, delivering savings of £250k.
9. Supported 2,6005 households with income maximisation, helping them secure an additional £3.3m in welfare benefits such as Personal Independence Payment and Attendance Allowance.
10. Used data-led software to identify households not claiming pension credit. Overall, this campaign generated over £1.2m in support to 270 households with an average annual value of £3,414 to each household.
11. Delivered Governments 7th Household Support Fund, providing financial support to over 26,000 residents of the Boroughs lowest income households including:
 - a. Payments totalling £200,000 to households in crisis for food, fuel and essential goods.
 - b. 14,500 Cash exchangeable vouchers issued to all households receiving council tax reduction.
 - c. Assessment of 450 successful discretionary support applications.
 - d. Provision of vouchers to approximately 280 care leavers and 3,300 adult carers.

12. Continued delivery of the Powering our Future Transformation Review of Corporate Administration and Business Services. In-year actions include closure of the council courier service, adoption of alternative document distribution arrangements, and increased digitalisation of processes, achieving savings of £235k.

Challenges

13. Preparation for the 1 April 2026 government reforms to business rates was complex, with particular challenge arising from the scale and number of changes implemented simultaneously. The service was required to introduce a new rating list following national revaluation, apply a revised calculation methodology increasing multipliers from two to five, and review property classifications to support the new retail, hospitality and leisure relief. Together, these changes necessitated revisions to long-standing billing assumptions, system upgrades and the development of new local processes, all delivered within tight timescales.
14. Significant organisational changes at our core software supplier have delayed the development of online and automated processes, impacted delivery timescales and slowed progress on digitalising services.
15. Postage costs continue to rise. Reducing outbound hard-copy mail is a key workstream within the Powering our Future Transformation Review of Corporate Administration and Business Services, with a focus on working with services to shift to appropriate digital alternatives.

Emerging Issues

16. Government has announced changes to the billing and collection of council tax following its recent consultation *Modernising and Improving the Administration of Council Tax*. Statutory regulation changes are expected this year with changes taking effect from April 2027. Some of the changes include the statutory monthly instalment scheme extending from 10 to 12 months and an extension to the minimum wait period before taxpayer who have defaulted in payment can be progressed through the recovery process.
17. The team is preparing for the introduction of Governments Crisis Resilience Fund (CRF) which replaces Household Support Fund and Discretionary Housing Payment. The fund will support low-income households who encounter a financial shock and initiatives that build financial resilience. The fund is locally designed in accordance with Government guidance and requires robust monitoring and reporting to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to ensure spend meets the requirements of the fund.
18. New 'Taking Control of Goods' Regulations come into force on 1 May 2026 and include a new fee structure and adjusted timelines for progressing through the enforcement agent (previously known as bailiff) process. The council delivers an in-house enforcement agent

service and therefore systems, processes and fee structure will be updated to reflect the changes.

19. In October 2024, government announced that from 2026 the administration of pensioner Housing Benefit (HB) and Pension Credit for new claimants will be brought together. This project is being delivered by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in collaboration with LAs and is in its early stages; the focus is to make it simpler for pensioners to claim their entitlements rather than a wholesale merger of these benefits. DWP intend to commence testing with a small cohort of customers in Autumn of this year.

Name of Contact Officer: Michelle Connolly

Post Title: Assistant Director Revenues, Benefits and Welfare

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Email address: michelle.connolly@stockton.gov.uk

Overview and Scrutiny



Overview Role

- In contrast to deep dive in-depth scrutiny reviews, Scrutiny Select Committees needs an element of oversight or overview
- Proposal to introduce regular performance reporting to Scrutiny Select Committees, aligned to Council & Service priorities linked to the Stockton-on-Tees Plan
- This will support Statutory Guidance on the types of information that might be shared to enable overview and Scrutiny Select Committees to discharge their roles effectively

Stockton-on-Tees Plan

Measuring Progress

**STOCKTON
ON
TEES**



POWERING OUR FUTURE
**THE STOCKTON-
ON-TEES PLAN**
2024-2028



OUR VISION

Stockton-on-Tees is home. It's 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 the Tees Valley, we are a dynamic, safe and healthy place where everyone can grow and succeed. We will continue to work together to reduce inequalities and barriers to opportunity. We are Team Stockton-on-Tees.

Read the
full plan



1

THE BEST START IN LIFE TO ACHIEVE BIG AMBITIONS

A safe and inclusive community where everyone can thrive. Working hard to prevent the impact of poverty, creating a bright and healthy future with a shared sense of belonging. Supporting children in our care and creating equality of opportunity

2

HEALTHY AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Building happy and healthy lives, supporting those who are experiencing poverty. Ensuring that our residents are resilient, independent

3

A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE, WORK AND VISIT

A vibrant and diverse place with an environment that is well looked after and outdoor spaces to enjoy that residents can be proud of



4

AN INCLUSIVE ECONOMY

Growing the local economy and cementing our role as the well-connected, economic heart of Tees Valley. Ensuring that all residents can benefit from secure and sustainable jobs

5

SUSTAINABLE COUNCIL

A well-run financially sustainable Council that improves outcomes for communities








**Community Safety Plan:
Stockton-on-Tees
2025 - 2027**



**Environmental Sustainability and
Carbon Reduction Strategy
2022 - 2032**



**Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Adult Social Care Strategy 2021 - 2025**



*Stockton-on-Tees
Employment & Training Hub*

**Inclusive Growth Strategy
2025-2028**

ALL IN LOVE WITH THE
PROCESS OF BECOMING
THE VERY BEST VERSION
OF YOURSELF

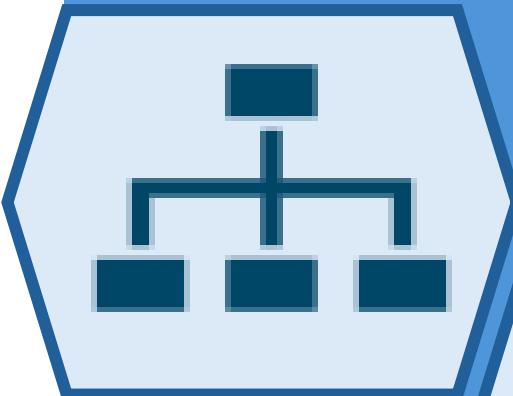


**Stockton-on-Tees
Joint Health and
Wellbeing Strategy
2025 - 2030**

Strengthening the building blocks
of health and wellbeing together



Bi-Annually



Cabinet

- Tier 1 (Council outcomes)



Select Committees

- Tier 2 (service outcomes & progress update)

Annually



Exec Scrutiny

- Tier 1 (Council outcomes)



Full Council

- Tier 1 (Council outcomes)

PRIORITIES

**WHAT'S BEEN
DONE**

- List of priorities that the specific service is currently working on:
- *Priority 1*
- *Priority 2*
- *Etc.*

- List of actions that have been undertaken to try and improve the INDICATORS
- *Action 1*
- *Action 2*
- *Etc.*

- List of indicators (outcomes) that measures the progress of all the PRIORITIES:
- *Indicator 1*
- *Indicator 2*
- *Etc.*

- List of actions that have been proposed to try and improve the INDICATORS. These will be moved into WHATS BEEN DONE once complete.
- *Planned 1*
- *Planned 2*
- *Etc.*

INDICATORS

**PLANNED
ACTIVITY**

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People Select Committee – Work Programme 2026- 2027

Date (<u>2pm unless stated</u>)	Topic	Attendance
Monday 13 April 2026	Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Provision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working Group Lead for Careers 	Vanessa Housley, Aishah Waite, Chris Renahan Ian Caley & Fallon Duleavey
Monday 11 May 2026 (4pm)	Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Provision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working Group Lead for Transitions Monitoring: Progress Update – Scrutiny Review of Disabled Facilities Grant Overview & Performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finance Revenues, Benefits & Welfare Corporate Services 	Vanessa Housley & Aishah Waite Mike Mackin Sam Dixon Cllr Paul Rowling, Clare Harper, Michelle Connolly, Ged Morton, Leanne Dudhill
Monday 8 June 2026 (Informal)	Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Provision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summary of Evidence / Draft Recommendations 	Vanessa Housley & Aishah Waite
Monday 6 July 2026	Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Provision - Final Report	Vanessa Housley & Aishah Waite
Monday 7 September 2026	Monitoring: Progress Update – Scrutiny Review of Partnership Working in Early Help Xentrall Annual Report	Kellie Wigley & Aishah Waithe Ian Coxon
Monday 5 October 2026		
Monday 2 November 2026		
Monday 7 December 2026	Overview & Performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy, Systems & Improvement Customer Services & Digital Culture, Leisure & Events 	Cllr Norma Stephenson, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Reuben Kench, Tara Connor

People Select Committee – Work Programme 2026- 2027

Date (<u>2pm unless stated</u>)	Topic	Attendance
Monday 4 January 2027		
Monday 8 February 2027		
Monday 8 March 2027		

To be scheduled

Scrutiny Review of Procurement and Tendering Processes