

Date:

Monday 6 July 2026 at 2.00 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. Live Streaming

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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 - 16)

To approve the minutes of the last meeting held on 11 May 2026

6. Scrutiny Review of Post-16 Education (Pages 17 - 42)

To consider and agree the draft final report.

7. Scrutiny Review of Procurement and Tendering Processes (Pages 43 - 54)

To receive a background presentation from the link officer and consider and agree the draft scope and project plan

8. Chairs' Update and Work Programme 2026 - 2027 (Pages 55 - 56)



Ged Morton
Director of Corporate Services
Friday 26 June 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

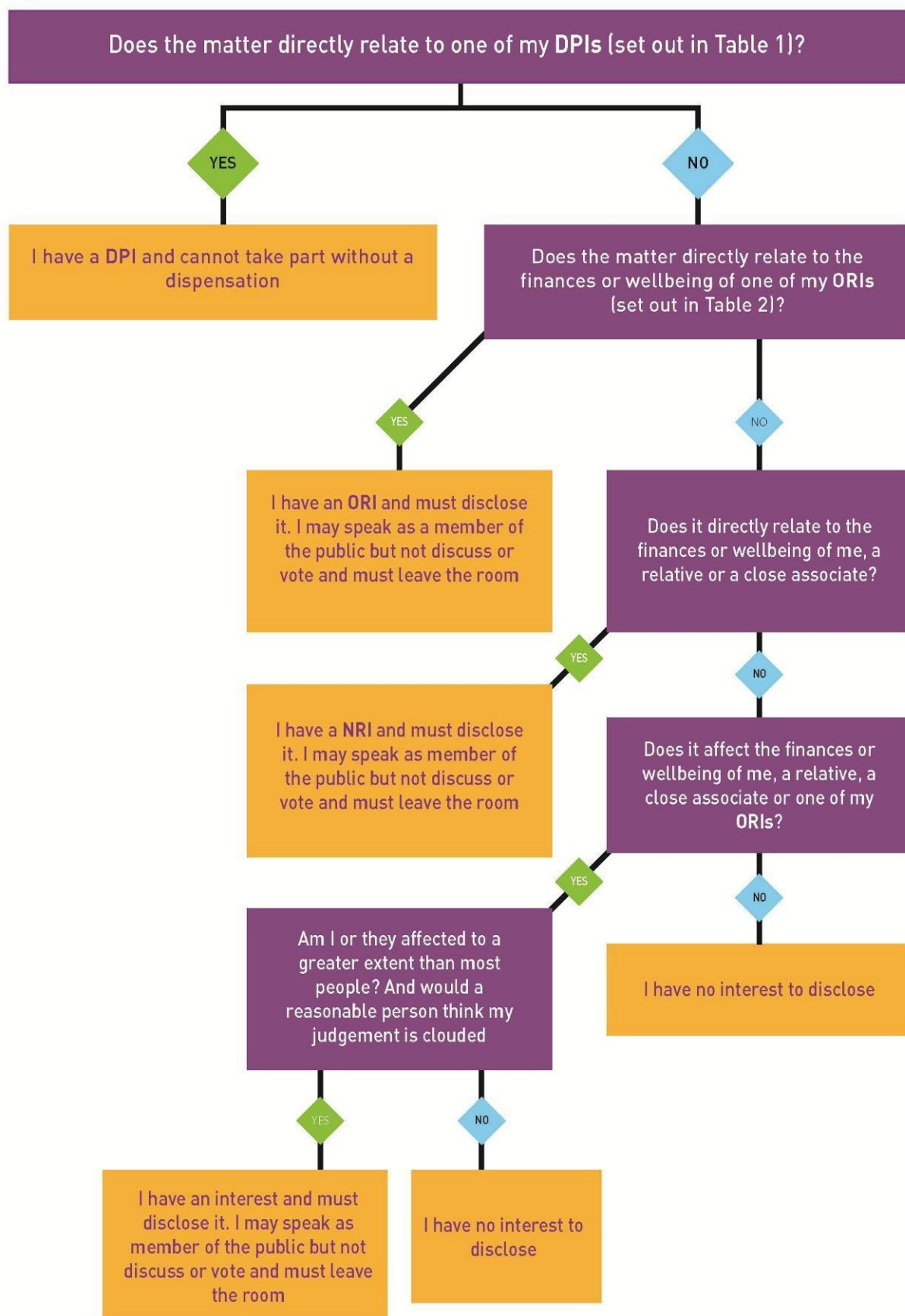


Table 1 - Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

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 Registrable 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 11th May 2026.

Present: Cllr Marilyn Surtees (Chair), Cllr Paul Weston (Vice-Chair), Cllr John Coulson (sub Cllr John Gardner), Cllr Mohammed Mazi (sub Cllr Niall Innes), Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Hugo Stratton

Officers: Michael Mackin (Atomix), Vanessa Housley (Children's Services), Sam Dixon (Adults, Health & Wellbeing), Ged Morton, Viv Latimer, Michelle Gunn, John Devine (Corporate Services)

Also in attendance: Cllr Paul Rowling

Apologies: Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley & Cllr Barry Woodhouse

PEO/6/26 Livestreaming

The Committee noted the livestreaming procedure.

PEO/7/26 Evacuation Procedure

The Committee noted the evacuation and housekeeping procedure.

PEO/8/26 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

PEO/9/26 Minutes

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 13 April be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

PEO/10/26 Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Provision

The Committee received a presentation regarding the Post 16 Partnership Transitions Working Strand from the Head of Centre at Stockton Sixth Form College. The presentation included:

- The importance of providing early advice and guidance using a shared language and messaging, e.g. in Year 9 when young people choose their GCSE options, to build knowledge and understanding of the pathways available at post-16. This would encourage young people to make earlier decisions about colleges and courses rather than leaving it until later and choosing courses that may not be right for them. The proactivity of the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) in the last two years, working with schools and colleges to promote post-16 choices and provision, was praised.
- Transport was a major influence on the choice of post-16 provider, with young people choosing colleges that were easier or quicker to get to. It was found that if a young people lived within walking distance of a college, that was their

destination of choice. For others, depending on where the student lived, it could be easier for them to get public transport to providers outside of the Borough e.g. via one direct bus, rather than those inside the Borough where it was possible that they needed to take more than one bus.

- Friendship groups was also a considerable influence on young people's choices, however it had been found that when young people attended college their friendship groups changed, and some realise the course was not for them. In these cases, young people who had left the Borough for their course may return.
- Exit interviews were conducted for those who left courses and the reasons why students came to a college from another provider was also captured. Retention was measured from September for at least six weeks, and for some providers into November, as this was the timeframe students were most likely to change providers or courses.
- Collaborative work to support vulnerable learners and break down barriers was taking place. SBC were working really well with providers to ensure that they had the information they needed to help those young people "land" at the right provider, building relationship with young people to assist in their transition to post-16 provision, and therefore be more likely to stay on the course.
- Greater clarity was needed for sharing of data and communication to ensure that young people were integrated quickly into colleges and any barriers were removed. SBC were ensuring providers were receiving accurate and timely information both before and when GCSE results were released to try to ensure that all young people had a place in post-16 provision and assist with the transition.
- Data sharing systems would only collect the information that was needed and not information over and above, to ensure compliance with data protection legislation. Providers were working to understand how to explain to students and their families who did not want to share their data the reasons why it was needed and how to make them to feel safe to do so.
- The Post-16 transitions survey key findings emphasised the importance of travel for young people when making their decisions, as well as early communication. The offer of post-16 provision was competitive, with different routes e.g. A level, vocational, apprenticeship. The survey would be repeated in the next academic year, and it was hoped that the percentage of students staying local would be increased.
- Providers were working with SBC to ensure skills and requirements needed by local industry were covered.
- Events and engagement that involved Year 9 students was crucial to ensure that they were better informed when making their decisions in Year 11.
- Since the Post-16 partnership collaboration, attendance to events and applications had increased, however students were applying for more than one provider, both within and outside of the Borough.

The Committee discussed the importance of transport, including knowing the local bus routes and issues that arose when a student missed their bus or a bus was late. It was suggested that advertising transport routes early would be useful and may impact on retention. It was noted that information and messages on transport was shared, not only with potential student but also with parents/carers who needed to feel confident their young person was safe. This not only included sharing bus timetables, but for Stockton Sixth Form Colleges there were free buses to Thornaby and Ingleby Barwick for students along with free bus passes. However, there were economic challenges for doing so. The Post-16 Partnership was due to meet with SBC's Strategic Transport

Manager to discuss transport issues with a view to influence the strategic planning of transport both locally and regionally.

Social media was raised, and it was noted that providers were communicating to young people on a broad range of social media channels including Tiktok which was currently the main channel for young people. There was a challenge, however, to ensure that the use language that young people would engage with.

AGREED the information be noted.

PEO/11/26 Progress Update - Review of Disabled Facilities Grants

The Committee considered a progress update including assessments of progress following implementation of the recommendations from the Scrutiny Review of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). This was the second update to be presented to the Committee, noting progress with the eight outstanding recommendations, two of which had been achieve and four on track.

Recommendations four and five, regarding arrangements with Registered Providers and producing a register of adapted properties, had slipped due to ongoing discussions with Thirteen taking longer than expected. However there had been progress made and the process agreed. Development on the register had started, with five years of data, but it was important to also get data from the Registered Providers. In addition, landlord applications were being promoted, engaging with Thirteen, North Star and Accent to start with. The benefits of landlord application were that the tenant would not been means tested by the Council and placed on the waiting list, but there was still scrutiny from the DFG team to ensure the DFG specification met the need. A pilot was being held with North Star, and the first landlord application had been put through. Case Studies would be developed after a year of the pilot to promote to other registered providers in the area.

AGREED the Progress Update be noted, and the assessment of progress be confirmed. The next progress update would be presented in six months.

PEO/12/26 Overview Report: Corporate Services and Revenues, Benefits and Welfare Services

The Committee received an overview report from the Director of Corporate Services which provided details of key achievements and challenges in 2025-2026 for the different services within this area and the emerging issues. Key points highlighted included:

- Corporate Services had a wide range of functions including governance, legal, elections, workforce, communications, performance, risk, and digital, and while these were seen to be back-office services it was emphasised that without them the front line could not operate. The functions being carried out supported colleagues and service from all directorates.
- Being accessible to residents was important for the Council and that included both social media presence and ensuring that the website could be accessed by people with different needs. There had been 1.6 million social media impression in April 2006, and the website had a high accessibility score of 99.6%.

- The Service was also involved in modernising the Council, putting in place a new corporate governance compliance system, project management tools, and performance clinics.
- Work was ongoing with Team Stockton, which was a collection of public sector bodies such as Police and Health as well as others, to share data and information which would assist in better understanding where pressures were coming from and what was affecting residents.
- Implementation of livestream meetings had been very complex to ensure that it was properly accessible and streamlined for all residents to view.
- Engagement with young people was taking place to ensure that they were registering to vote in future elections and aware of the democratic processes.
- The approach to recruitment had been updated to attract the best quality of staff in what was now a challenging and competitive market. A recent example was carrying out recruitment in-house for the Director of Neighbourhoods post rather than buying executive recruitment and research. A recruitment video for the Council was also shown which showcased the variety of careers available. Workforce wellbeing, development, and engagement was also important to retain staff.
- There was a high expectation from residents for more openness and transparency, and this was reflected in a higher number of Freedom of Information requests being received along with a higher number of Data Subject Access Requests.

The Cabinet member for Resources and Transport highlighted key points from the overview report for Revenues, Benefits, and Welfare members had received with their agenda, which included:

- There had been investment in digital software to ensure effective administration of council tax collection and business rates and identifying households not claiming welfare they were entitled to such as pension credit which had generated over £1.2million in support to 270 households.
- There had been work carried out to identify where circumstances had changed for single occupancy Council Tax discounts, property valuations, occupied properties and small business rates relief to ensure that not only was the Council receiving the income it should, but residents and businesses were getting the support that they need.
- There had been a change in the billing system, replacing emails for electronic bill with the online portal, which was more secure, and nearly 60% of residents had signed up to the portal.
- The North East Council Tax Care Leavers scheme, giving support for eligible care leavers up to the age of 25, which the Council had taken a lead on designing and implementing, had been rolled out across the North East Authorities.
- The Household Support Fund had enabled the Council to assist 26,000 residents on low incomes. This included choosing to provide vouchers to care leavers and adult carers, giving recognition from the Council to adult carers of the massive role they play in society.
- There had been a high number of changes in welfare taking place which was a challenge, and the Council along with local authorities across the country would be working with the Department for Work and Pensions to implement these. The government had also changed the rules regarding how residents could pay council tax, and this was something to be managed.

The Cabinet member also reminded members that if they had any queries regarding Council Tax or benefits from their residents, these could be forwarded to either himself or the Service for a response.

The Committee gave positive feedback on the recruitment video and highlighted the importance of digitalisation as well as the move towards livestreaming meetings to increase transparency and communication with residents.

An officer from the SBC Strategic Planning Team was also in attendance and briefly outline how future performance information would be presented. Work was ongoing to finalise key performance indicators (KPIs) linked to the Stockton-on-Tees Plan, and reporting would involve the relaying of tier 1 measure (Council outcomes) bi-annually to Cabinet and annually to the Executive Scrutiny Committee and Full Council. Tier 2 measure (service outcomes and progress update, including data that supports SBC strategies/plans) would be reported bi-annually to the five Select Committees, with the first due to be presented to People Select Committee in December 2026.

AGREED that the Overview Reports be noted.

PEO/13/26 Chair's Update and Work Programme 2026-2027

The Chair and Vice-Chair had attended the Post-16 Partnership that took place on 11 May, which included presentations and reports regarding funding, UCAS, and the transport impact of Every Child Achieving and Thriving White Paper. It was felt that the Partnership was focused on outcomes and opportunities for young people. It was further suggested that, from the meeting attended, the Partnership was very affective and achieving their goals, making real improvements for post-16 provision.

Consideration was given to the Committee's work programme.

AGREED the Chairs update and work programme be noted.

Chair:

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Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Education

People Select Committee, July 2026

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Select Committee – Membership

Councillor Marilyn Surtees (Chair)

Councillor Paul Weston (Vice-Chair)

Councillor John Gardner

Councillor Niall Innes

Councillor Eileen Johnson

Councillor David Reynard

Councillor Hugo Stratton

Councillor Sylvia Walmsley

Councillor Barry Woodhouse

Acknowledgements

The Select Committee thank the following contributors to this review:

Vanessa Housley – Head of Service, Education and Inclusion, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Aishah Waithe – Project Manager, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Ian Caley – Team Manager, Careers, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Fallon Dunleavy – Employment & Training Hub Manager, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Neil Gittins – Head of School, Egglescliffe School & Sixth Form College

Mike Mackin – Head of Centre, Stockton Sixth Form College, Atomix

Noel Dennis – Director of Business Development, Stockton Sixth Form College, Atomix

Erika Marshall – Group Marketing and Business Engagement Director, Education Training Collective

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Forward

[Add in]

Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Chair



Councillor Marilyn Surtees
Chair – People Select Committee



Councillor Paul Weston
Vice-Chair – People Select Committee

Original Brief

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 Middlesbrough 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?

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.

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the People Select Committee's scrutiny review of Post-16 Education.
- 1.2. 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, namely Conyers School and Sixth Form, Egglescliffe School and Sixth Form College, Stockton Sixth Form College, and The Education Training Collective (Etc), which has two site, Bede Sixth Form College, Stockton Riverside College. Etc also have the NETA site which has an engineering focus.
- 1.3. The review aimed to consider the current position, challenges and proposed solutions in Stockton-on-Tees' post-16 provision. In doing so, the review aimed 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.
- 1.4. A Post-16 Partnership has been established to enhance strategic collaboration and communication between providers, improve the quality of education and training in the borough, share best practice and innovative approaches, identify and address common challenges facing the sector, and develop and implement strategies to promote the offer more widely. The partnership has senior representatives from all the providers, careers service, school support, education. Economic development and other relevant stakeholders.

Excellence for All

- 1.5. While there is a natural competitiveness between the providers, who are seeking to recruit students to their courses, genuine collaboration is taking place via the Post-16 Partnership to improve outcomes across the borough. The Excellence for All Work Strand is focussing on ensuring there is a strong offer with good outcomes across the borough that encourage students to enrol at in-borough providers. Two trials have taken place to address the outcomes: Business Mentor Support – Excellence for All, which aims to support students fulfil their full potential and bridge the gap between education and work; and Teach Meets which aims to bring teachers together to share best practice, practical innovations, and personal insights.
- 1.6. Further collaboration taking place includes providers receiving monthly information on young people Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET), information on funding opportunities as these arise, and local employer information and business intelligence in terms of gaps and areas of growth, with sectors now speaking directly to students which has proved to be more powerful than providers sharing the information with students. Partnerships are in place with providers to offer industry placements, provide the learning for apprenticeships, and co-create curriculum with employers in key growth sectors.

Communication and Marketing

- 1.7. The Committee heard how the different providers are communicating and marketing their courses to schools both within the Borough and the wider Tees Valley area through a range of engagement activities targeted at Years 9 – 11, however there are some activities regarding careers choices aimed at younger year groups. Engagement and recruitment activity begins in September and continues throughout the year.

- 1.8. The Post-16 Partnership Communication and Marketing Work Strand aims to work together to keep students local and has developed a communications and marketing initiative spanning industry engagement, careers provision, transitions, and enrichment programmes. Activities that have taken place include creating a framework to map current engagement activity and identifying growth sectors and businesses, producing a Post-16 brochure showcasing each provider as part of place brand messaging of Stockton-on-Tees being a place to study, live, work and play, and Mystery Shopper exercises.
- 1.9. The Work Strand is now building on this foundation by developing a school engagement toolkit available for all staff showcasing the local offer, Alumni success stories profiling local people who built careers in Stockton-on-Tees and Digital ambassadors advocating for Stockton-on-Tees. Postcards directing prospective students to the Post-16 Brochure and a glossary of terms making this easier to understand are also being developed and a Stockton Post Secondary Pre-Open Event is planned for September 2026, giving young people and parents a chance to get initial information on all providers in one convenient location
- 1.10. Providers have seen an increase in engagement from school leavers at events and this has resulted in a significant increase in the number of applications to all in-borough providers. It should be noted, however, that school leavers may apply for more than one course including at providers out of borough.

Careers Advice

- 1.11. Providing early advice and guidance is considered essential in supporting young people to choose the right post-16 pathway for their talents and ambitions and secondary schools and colleges have a duty to provide careers education to all their students in Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 5. Schools fulfil this duty either in-house by directly employing a qualified Careers Adviser, or by contracting with a Careers Guidance provider. SBC's Careers has contracts with five schools. It also currently provides targeted support to Year 11 residents in Stockton-on-Tees who require further support, with the demand and complexity increasing significantly over time.
- 1.12. Both universal and targeted Careers Guidance is also available in all colleges/Years 12 and 13. This include in-house staff and SBC Careers, who currently offer progressive tailored support. SBC Careers is aiming to develop systems across colleges where they are made aware of declining attendance, attainment, or behaviour early so that support can be offered before crisis or students leave.
- 1.13. A Phase 2 Transformation Outcome-based review regarding Opportunities for Young People in Employment (OYPE) has been taking place at the same time of the Scrutiny Review, with a focus on operational redesign of the SBC Careers Service current service model to improve NEET outcomes via early intervention and digital first as well as operating within a reduced budget. The review is ongoing and will be undertaken in alignment with, and complementary to, the Scrutiny Review of Post-16 Education, ensuring consistency and that Scrutiny recommendations are included. The findings and outputs from this review will be considered alongside the Scrutiny Review and will inform recommendations.
- 1.14. In addition to careers advice and guidance provided in schools and colleges, the Employment & Training Hub has also been delivering programmes for young people of the borough to raise their knowledge, ambitions, and personal skills. These include Skills for Success, Excellence for All, Youth Guarantee Trailblazer, Care Experience Young Person Recruitment Coordinator, and Industry Insights.

- 1.15. The Careers Network Work Strand supports colleges to identify gaps in career education, share good practice and highlight innovative and inspiring opportunities. This has included working with Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), who are relaunching their Business Directory, and facilitating dialogue between schools and colleges and the TVCA Work Experience Coordinator. Roadshows activities are also being developed for Key Stage 3 Work Experience Week and “How To” guides shared for Key Stage 4 Work Experience Week. Finally, a Parent & Carer guide to careers has been developed.

Transitions from School to Post 16 Provision

- 1.16. The Committee were informed that the Transitions Work Strand aims to strengthen retention and progression as well as understand challenges faced by providers and how best to give advice and guidance to young people and parents/carers. A student survey has been conducted to find out what influences their decisions when applying for courses. There is a wide range of courses available, all providers are rated as Outstanding or Good by OFSTED, and outcomes are competitive. The survey results reiterated that the in-borough provision offer is competitive.
- 1.17. However, the survey highlighted that transport is an important factor, with young people choosing to attend providers that are quick and easy to get to. In some areas of the Borough it is easier to travel to out-of-borough providers, with direct and frequent bus routes, rather than travel across town which may take longer and require changing buses.
- 1.18. The survey also highlighted early engagement and awareness as being important when making post-16 choices. A shared language and messaging are important to help young people and parents/carers understand the different pathways, and a Jargon Buster has been proposed to simplify the process.
- 1.19. SBC teams are assisting in the transition to post-16 by ensuring providers have the information they need to support vulnerable learners in to the right provider/courses, and the multi-agency event Preparing for Adulthood Day proved to be effective. However, there are still challenges including late identification of non-attenders and inconsistent application systems, and a Borough-wide data framework using both school and college data management systems is being developed to strengthen this.

Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

- 1.20. In April members were informed that NEET was 7.3%, a rise from 5% in 2020. The impact of additional staff resources in Leaving Care Team and Employment & Training Hub has not yet been seen in the national data for Care Experienced young people NEET rate, however smaller caseloads and increased proactive support for those with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) has had a positive impact on reducing the NEET rate.
- 1.21. The OYPE review that has taken place is proposing a new service model and operational redesign to improve awareness of opportunities, strengthen transitions, and influence a reduction in NEET rates.

Conclusion and Recommendations

- 1.22. The Committee recognises the importance of building on the strong foundations already in place for post-16 collaboration and improving outcomes. The Committee concludes that with sustained focus and collective commitment, there is significant opportunity to further enhance post-16 education in Stockton-on-Tees, improving participation, reducing NEET levels, and enabling more young people to achieve their potential while contributing to the borough's future economic growth.

1.23. The Committee recommends that:

1. Transition support is strengthened by developing a consistent borough-wide transition framework between schools and post-16 providers, including clear pre-enrolment guidance, earlier course matching, data sharing, and structured support during the first term/end of Year 12 when drop-out risk is highest.
2. Early warning systems for flagging declining attendance, behaviour, and attainment are embedded across all post-16 providers with clear escalation and intervention pathways are in place before disengagement reaches crisis point.
3. Collaborative initiatives that are showing signs of successfully assisting young people, such as Teach Meets, Skills for Success, and Business Mentor Support, are expanded to all providers and prioritising subjects with historically smaller student cohorts.
4. Communication between all providers and young people and their parents/carers regarding the Post-16 in-Borough offer is strengthened
5. Careers education is embedded in to the curriculum in all schools and post-16 providers to ensure young people choose the right pathways for them and reduce early withdrawal by:
 - ensuring careers advice and guidance/post 16 options are available from Year 9 (or earlier) to enable young people to build their knowledge
 - developing resources and staff training to show how subject-specific knowledge and skills translate into employment, business and industry
 - give clear course expectations, progression routes and employment outcomes to reduce early withdrawal from and dissatisfaction with courses.
6. Labour-market intelligence and cohort growth data is utilised to plan academic, vocational and apprenticeship provision more strategically, to ensure capacity keeps pace with demand and competition between age groups does not disadvantage younger learners.
7. Cross-provider enrichment opportunities are broadened to not only create a more competitive offer compared with regional competitors but also raise aspirations.
8. Post-16 providers explore collaborative approaches and strategic networks to address transport barriers, highlighted as a significant influence on post-16 choice including connectivity to all in-Borough post-16 providers and cost, so young people can access efficient, cost effective in-borough provision.
9. Post-16 providers ensure that vocational courses provide coherent pathways to meet industry requirements

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1. This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the People Select Committee's scrutiny review of Post-16 Education.
- 2.2. 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. It is imperative that students choose courses that align best with their talents and ambitions to ensure successful outcomes for their future. While in some cases this may be a course at an out of Borough provider, for most students there should be a place in-borough for them.
- 2.3. The review aimed to consider the current position, challenges, and proposed solutions in the Stockton-on-Tees post 16 provision. In doing so, the review aimed 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.
- 2.4. The Committee undertook 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?
- 2.5. Contributions were sought and subsequently received from Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Education and Inclusion Service, Careers Service, and Employment & Training Hub. Contributions were also received from several partners leading on the work strands of the Post-16 Partnership, including Egglecliffe School and Sixth Form College, Stockton Sixth Form College, and Education Training Collective. The results of a student survey carried out by the Post-16 Partnership were also shared with the Committee.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 There are five providers of post-16 education within Stockton-on-Tees: Conyers School and Sixth Form, Egglecliffe School and Sixth Form, Stockton Sixth Form College and The Education Training Collective (Etc) who have two sites, Bede Sixth Form College and Stockton Riverside College. Etc also have the NETA site which has an engineering focus. There is a higher than national average A Level pass rate across the Borough of 98% in 2025, however the rate of students achieving A*-B grades at A level is below the national average at 44.2% across the Borough.
- 3.2 Enrolment data for both 2024/25 and 2025/26 shows that over 40% of young people in Stockton-on-Tees are choosing to attend out-of-Borough providers, with the most popular of these being Middlesbrough College and Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form.

- 3.3 A Post-16 Partnership has been established to enhance strategic collaboration and communication between post-16 education providers, improve the quality of education and training in the borough, share best practice and innovative approaches, identify and address common challenges facing the sector, and develop and implement strategies to promote the offer more widely. The partnership has senior representatives from all the post-16 providers, Career Service, School Support, Education, Economic Development and other relevant stakeholders. Four work strands have been created to deliver tangible actions: Excellence for All, Communications and Marketing, Careers, and Transitions
- 3.4 In addition, the Children and Young People's Appreciative Inquiry in Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment made recommendations that impact on post-16 provision. These are regarding improving communication, extending the enrichment offer, strengthening understanding of career pathways, and strengthen transition arrangements. Each of the recommendations are being driven forward by senior officers.

4.0 Evidence

Excellence for All: Collaboration and Support

- 4.1. Challenges for recruitment to the in-borough providers include the curriculum offer, curriculum success, and the incentives that are being offered by some out-of-borough providers. While there is a natural competitiveness between the providers, who are seeking to recruit students to their courses, genuine collaboration is taking place via the Post-16 Partnership to improve outcomes across the borough. The Excellence for All Work Strand is focussing on ensuring there is a strong offer with good outcomes across the borough that encourage students to enrol at in-borough providers. Two trials have taken place to address the outcomes, business mentor support and teach meet.

Business Mentor Support – Excellence for All

- 4.2. Business Mentor Support is a collaboration between Bede Sixth Form College and Egglescliffe School and Sixth Form College initially to bring together business and education. It is being led by the Employment and Training Hub with senior staff in schools and colleges invited to contribute to the plan.
- 4.3. The colleges have identified students who are academically vulnerable, are not carrying on to university, or do not know what their next step will be, to take part in a series of interventions and masterclasses to improve their confidence, study skills, leadership skills, employability and knowledge of business sectors. Masterclasses have included communication skills, interviewing the mentor, and understanding business sectors where they were asked to research salaries, qualification, and interests in different sectors.
- 4.4. The initiative aims to support students to fulfil their full potential both academically and personally and bridge the gap between education and the world of work.

- 4.5. Feedback from the students taking part in the trial has been positive and it is planned to be extended to other schools and colleges in the future.

Teach Meet

- 4.6. Teach meets bring together teachers from different providers to share best practice, practical innovations, and personal insights on teaching. Two Teach Meets were held in November 2025 and February 2026, focussed on eight subject areas, to discuss, plan and implement a series of interventions to achieve stronger exam outcomes. The subjects chosen were those that are either underperforming or only had one class in a college with limited discussion with colleagues.
- 4.7. The focus of the November session included what do students enjoy and are successful in, what do students find challenging, which areas of the specification are challenging, and what can colleges do together to close the gaps. The February session planned masterclasses on exam skills, essay skills and question analysis to enable students to achieve B and above grades.
- 4.8. Staff feedback was positive, with them valuing the time spent collaborating with their colleagues.

Further collaboration

- 4.9. Providers are receiving monthly information on Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) as well as funding opportunities as these arise.
- 4.10. Providers are also receiving local employer information and business intelligence in terms of gaps and areas of growth. While providers previously shared this information with their students, the sectors are now speaking directly to students through the collaborations in place, e.g. Industry Speaker Programmes, and this has proved to be more powerful.
- 4.11. Employer demand is driving the balance between academic and vocational training that is available within the borough's providers. Stockton Sixth Form College has a number of partnerships with industry to offer placements in Aviation, Engineering and Health, giving real world experience and developing hands-on technical/clinical skills, while Etc provide the learning for apprenticeships. Stockton Sixth Form College co-create curriculum with employers in key growth sectors of Health & Care, Advanced Manufacturing, and Digital Sectors, to understand the skills and knowledge that they require and supporting the Tees Valley Local Skills Improvement Plan Alignment (LSIP).

Communication and Marketing

- 4.12. The Committee heard how the different providers are communicating and marketing their courses to schools both within the Borough and the wider Tees Valley area through a range of engagement activities. These include, but not limited to:
- [Presentations and Y10 – Y11 Assemblies](#)
 - [School Liaison Programmes, monthly newsletters to schools etc.](#)
 - [Lunch Drop-ins/Careers Corner](#)
 - [Parent Evenings & Advice Evenings](#)
 - [Open Evenings Series](#)

- Careers Fairs (in school and large events)
- Campus Tours (1-1 and groups) and taster sessions
- Explorer Days providing immersive experiences
- Alumni Engagement with regular sessions connecting with successful graduates
- Careers In... days and Y9 – Y10 Careers Guidance
- Mock Interviews
- Revision Support events
- Preparing for work
- Application Sessions and Workshops / Y10 – Y11 Transition Support
- Digital Partnerships – websites social media and digital campaigns

- 4.13. Within the engagement activity, clarity is provided on the academic and technical pathways such as vocational/T-Level/apprenticeship routes, A-Level pathways, engineering and other industry pathways.
- 4.14. Engagement and recruitment activity begins in September and continues throughout the year. Recruitment activity is targeted at Years 9 – 11, however there is some engagement activity regarding career choices aimed at younger year groups. Providers such as Etc noted that they support young people throughout their decision-making journey – awareness, guidance, experience and transition.
- 4.15. Providers believe that it is imperative that the right learner is on the right course with the right provider and therefore give impartial advice and guidance. They will signpost to other providers, whether that be in-borough or outside of borough, when a school leaver has a specific interest that they do not cater for.

Work Strand Collaboration

- 4.16. The Post 16 Partnership Communication and Marketing Work Strand aims to work together to keep students local and has developed a communications and marketing initiative spanning industry engagement, careers provision, transitions, and enrichment programmes. It seeks to:
- Promote equitable access to local post-16 providers
 - Develop compelling messaging about the benefits of studying locally
 - Create a compelling case for school heads to support local providers
 - Showcase career opportunities aligned with growth sectors in the borough
- 4.17. The Work Strand has established the foundations for promoting local post-16 education and understanding choice factors. This has included creating a framework to map current engagement activity with parents and schools and identifying growth sectors and businesses.
- 4.18. Place brand messaging has been seen as a key factor, showcasing Stockton-on-Tees as a place not only to study but also “live, work, play”. A post-16 brochure has been produced and promoted via social media which showcases each of the providers within the Borough, highlighting the reasons to study at each and giving student testimony.

- 4.19. Mystery Shopper exercises have taken place at Middlesbrough College and Queen Elizabeth open event, via colleagues in in-borough providers attending these events with their own school leaving aged children and reporting back. The findings from these suggests that providers outside of the borough have similar offers to in-borough providers, and there is some duplication. Marketed goodie bags offered by some providers are seen as a simple incentive tool being used, as they act as a visual prompt when school leavers are making their decisions.
- 4.20. The Work Strand is now building on the foundation work already carried out by developing resources and evidence to make a compelling case for students to stay in-borough for their post-16 education. A school engagement toolkit has been developed which will be available for all staff within schools showcasing the local offer. This will enable all those working in schools to be aware of the opportunities and be able to give simple advice and suggestions. Other activities include:
- Alumni success stories profiling local people who built careers in Stockton-on-Tees
 - Digital ambassadors advocating for Stockton-on-Tees
 - Postcards directing prospective students to the Post-16 Brochure and a glossary of terms making the Brochure easier to understand
 - A Stockton Post Secondary Pre-Open Event, which is planned for September 2026, giving young people and parents a chance to get initial information on all providers in one convenient location.

Impact

- 4.21. Providers have seen an increase in engagement from school leavers at events. Etc reported in March 2026 that they have seen a 42% increase in attendance at open events from 2022/23, and Stockton Sixth Form College reported an 86% growth in open evening attendance. Stockton Sixth Form College also reported a 48.26% growth in website traffic.
- 4.22. The increase in engagement has resulted in a significant increase in the number of applications to in-borough providers:
- Egglecliffe Sixth Form had received their target of 170 application by January 2026, 50 more applications at the same point in the previous academic year.
 - Stockton Sixth Form College reported in March they have had an 89.4% year-on-year increase in active applications
 - Etc reported in March that their year-to-date active application had increased 24.4% from the previous year, with a 6.64% increase from Stockton-on-Tees school leavers, and a 57% increase in active application over a four-year period. Etc. enrolments include 695 students from 'out of borough'
- 4.23. This increase is encouraging, giving an indication of the number of students expected in the September 2026 intake and thereby the work streams initiatives success. It should be noted, however, that school leavers may apply for more than one course, in some cases as many as five providers including providers out of borough, therefore not all applications will result in enrolment.

Careers Advice

- 4.24. Providing early advice and guidance is considered essential in supporting young people to choose the right post-16 pathway for their talents and ambitions. Secondary schools and colleges have a duty to provide careers education to all their students in Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 5, typically including at least one career discussion per student, with additional support available depending on resources. The Gatsby Benchmarks provides a clear framework of how to deliver this duty, covering areas such as a stable careers programme, labour market information, personalised support, linking curriculum with careers, employer engagement, workplace experience, and encounters with further and higher education.
- 4.25. Schools fulfil this duty either in-house by directly employing a qualified Careers Adviser, or by contracting with a Careers Guidance provider. In Stockton-on-Tees Borough, four schools provide in-house provision, while the remaining schools contract one of three providers: CareerWave, Prospects, or SBC's Careers with this element of the Careers Service being a traded service receiving full cost recovery. SBC Career's has contracts with Egglecliffe, Ian Ramsey, Northfield, St Patrick's and Red House schools.
- 4.26. SBC Careers also currently provide targeted support to Year 11 residents in Stockton-on-Tees who require further support, with the demand and complexity increasing significantly over time, from 325 young people in 2013 to over 700 in 2026. The support provided is mainly 1:1 Careers Guidance discussion but can also include engaging with parents and carers, small groups work, home visits, tracking progress, supporting applications and visits to providers, identifying barriers to progression and offering support to overcome these. This activity can support all eight Gatsby Benchmarks; however the service is very focused on identification of needs to facilitate accurate targeting of support and providing destination data to schools and ensuring everyone has individual careers guidance by the end of Year 11. SBC Careers aims to ensure that young people know what they want to do after school by the end of February each year.
- 4.27. Both universal and targeted Careers Guidance is also available in colleges/Years 12 and 13. All colleges have Careers staff who work across the whole college, and they may also be involved in recruitment to the college as well as progression from college to another opportunity.
- 4.28. SBC Careers currently have Progression Advisers in all colleges, offering progressive support tailored to risk levels of drop out/leave to NEET. This could be working on a request basis or having a weekly presence in the college, however the service proactively offers support at the start of the Year 12 and towards the end of Year 12, which are the key transition points where a young person may leave to NEET. SBC is also contracted to provide guidance to complement the Stockton Sixth Form College in-house Careers support. The service is aiming to develop systems across colleges where they are made aware of declining attendance, attainment, or behaviour early so that support can be offered before crisis or the student leave.
- 4.29. During the review the Committee were aware that a Phase 2 Transformation Outcome-based review regarding Opportunities for Young People in Employment (OYPE) was taking place. The OYPE review focused on operational redesign of the current service model for the Careers Service to improve NEET outcomes via early intervention and digital first. It also had a clear remit to operate within a reduced budget, in accordance with the Medium-term Financial Plan (MFTP). This review therefore has direct links to the Committee's review, which is aiming to improve post-16 outcomes, and will consider the outcomes and recommendations from the Scrutiny Review.

Work experience

- 4.30. Work experience for both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 are a priority for schools and colleges, particularly with the incoming Work Experience Guarantee legislation, which aims to ensure every young person completes two weeks of meaningful work experience during school or college. Work experience is seen as a useful tool in re-engaging students, demonstrating how focussing at school relates to future employment. SBC will be consulting with schools to choose whether to deliver work experience activities themselves, ask teams across SBC including Careers and Employment & Training Hub to deliver work experience activities, or ask SBC to broker businesses to deliver work experience.
- 4.31. Key Stage 3 Work Experience Week can be split over the different year groups, building on each year, and activities focus on the skills needed for different industries. Key Stage 4 Work Experience Week can also include activities rather than a full week placement. Some schools may arrange work placements for those students who have clear career goals but may also arrange a split week of work placement and activities such as visiting different employers, or a week of activities for young people who are uncertain of their career path.

Employment & Training Hub

- 4.32. The Employment & Training Hub delivers programmes and support for all residents and businesses in the Borough. Businesses are engaged with the programmes, and all delivery is designed to meet skills shortages, future skills requirements, and benefit businesses Social Value requirements.
- 4.33. The Hub utilises the Equalex framework, which is a comprehensive structured, and inclusive model for delivering modern, meaningful careers education. It ensures young people progressively gain the skills, knowledge, insight and confidence needed to make informed decisions and transition successfully into the world of work. Programmes for young people of the borough includes:

- **Skills for Success**

A programme for secondary school students targeted for disengaged young people facing barriers. It links education with industry by showcasing opportunities in key sectors and personal skills. It includes guidance and support from business mentors, industry visits, sharing business intelligence, and team building and individual activities. At the end of the course a celebration event is held where students give a pitch for themselves. The feedback from the programme has been very positive. Students complete a survey at the end of the programme and 100% state they have a clear aspiration for their chosen career based on the input and visits throughout the project. In addition, schools have reported that students who have completed the programme have an improved attitude and engagement resulting in improved learning and progress, with a 60% increase in positive behaviour points and 82% decrease in negative points, and 93% are now on their individual targets for English and 71% are on their targets in maths.

- **Excellence for All**

A targeted pilot programmed for Years 12/13 outlined in paragraphs 4.2 – 4.5

- **Youth Guarantee Trailblazer**

Access to six months (changing to five months from 2026/27 financial year) paid work experience for any NEET young person aged 16-21 in Tees Valley. It is targeted support to young people who are

disengaged or at risk, helping them overcome barriers and move towards education, employment, or training. SBC is the only Trailblazer programme in England that is offering paid work experience.

- **Care Experienced Young Person Recruitment Coordinator**

Supports young people to identify the most appropriate pathway for their needs and goals, receiving tailored guidance and access to opportunities that build skills, confidence, and clear progression routes. Since its launch in October 2025 over 50 young people have been supported and in April 2026 27 of those have found employment.

- **Industry Insights**

A programme for disengaged NEET young people, it offers clear understanding of the world of work and highlights local opportunities via business mentors and industry visits.

- 4.34. In addition to the programmes being delivered at the Hub, it has been highlighted that more students are asking for Maths and English courses, with colleges offering these as stand-alone courses. The Employment & Training Hub, working with the SBC Careers, have procured online provision which students welcomed and are well attended.

Careers Network – Work Strand Collaboration

- 4.35. SBC have been asked to support colleges to identify gaps, share good practice, and highlight innovative and inspiring opportunities so that schools and colleges can decide how it fits into their provision. Schools and colleges have highlighted five key priorities for the Careers Network:

- Build a directory of businesses who engage well with school aged young people and can deliver various engagement activities
- Key Stage 3 Work Experience Week activities to inspire and inform young people in Years 7 – 9
- Key Stage 4 Work Experience Week support including identification of duties, contact with businesses, potential coordination of weeks across schools.
- Parent & Carer guide to Careers with tips on how to prepare young people for life after school
- Careers into the Curriculum such as support in developing “off-the-shelf” resources, how do skills and qualities advanced by each subject translate into the world of work

- 4.36. Progress is being made on four of the five priorities, with the Committee being informed in May 2026 that:

- Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) are relaunching their Business Directory and the Network has been updated and discussed how school and colleges can influence this.
- Roadshows activities are being developed for Key Stage 3 Work Experience Week, utilising the Tees Valley Care and Health Innovation Zone, Regeneration work at Tees Central, and building on Skills for Success.
- “How to” guides have been shared for Key Stage 4 Work Experience Week and the TVCA Work Experience Coordinator is due to meet with the Network.
- Content for Parent & Carer guide to careers has been agreed and at design stage.

- 4.37. Careers into the Curriculum is the lowest priority for schools and colleges and the Network had not started on tackling this. However, TVCA already provide support including resources through Tees Valley Careers website.

Transitions from School to Post 16 Provision

- 4.38. The Post 16 Partnership Transitions Work Strand aim to strengthen retention and progression as well as understand challenges faced by providers and how best to give advice and guidance to young people and parents/carers based on a collective understanding from all post-16 settings. There is a strong offer of post-16 provision within the Borough with a wide range of opportunities, all providers being rated as Outstanding and Good in their last OFSTED inspections, and outcomes competitive. While this is a great benefit for young people in the Borough, the amount of choice can be confusing for both young people and parents/carers. The academic language used can also be confusing, with different and changing types of courses available e.g. A Levels, T Levels, etc. A central Jagon Buster resource has been proposed to simplify the process.
- 4.39. The Work Strand conducted a survey of current students attending in-borough post-16 providers to find out what influenced their decisions when applying for courses, to which 340 students responded. The results reiterated that the in-borough provision was competitive, including different routes e.g. A level, vocational, and apprenticeships. Accessibility and convenience of transport as well as early engagement, including open events, were highlighted as the main drivers when making decisions.
- 4.40. Friendship groups are also considered to be an influence on young people's choices. This has an impact on retention as friendship groups can potentially change once attending college and may lead to students realising the course they chose is not for them. It is at this point that they may leave the provider and, if at an out of borough provider, return to in-borough provision.

Transport

- 4.41. When surveyed 82% of students said travel influenced their decision when considering and applying to post-16 providers, choosing to attend providers that are quick and easy to get to. It is also important for parents/carers to feel reassured their young person is safe travelling to their provider.
- 4.42. It has been found that if a young person lives within walking distance to a post-16 provider, that provider tends to be their destination of choice. For young people who do not have the option to walk to a provider, transport can be difficult. They may need to take two or three buses to get to a provider in a different part of the Borough from where they live, which can increase travel time. Issues can also arise when students or buses are running late, increasing the time it takes to get to their provider and making them either late for or miss the lesson.
- 4.43. In some areas of the Borough, it is easier to travel to out-of-borough providers on either provider or public transport, with direct bus routes, which may also be more frequent and/or take less time to get to their destination.
- 4.44. While details of bus timetables are shared at engagement events, some providers are providing free bus passes and putting on free buses to outlining parts of the Borough e.g. buses from Thornaby and Ingleby Barwick to Stockton Sixth Form College. There is, however, an economic challenge in doing so.

Early Engagement

- 4.45. As highlighted in paragraph 4.24 early awareness is key, using a shared language and messaging. This will help young people build their knowledge and understanding of the careers that they are interested in and the pathways available from when they choose their GCSE options in Year 9. It will then impact positively on their decisions at post-16, ensuring that they apply and enrol on the right course for them and reduce the likelihood of students dropping out and/or changing courses.
- 4.46. Early awareness and shared language/messaging is also key to helping parents better understand how GCSE outcomes can link to post-16 progression.
- 4.47. Work Experience is an important part of early engagement, helping young people to understand the industries and careers in the local area. Paragraph 4.30 notes how the SBC is developing borough-wide programmes to comply with the Work Experience Guarantee.
- 4.48. It is noted in paragraphs 4.12 – 4.20, that there is a wide range of events and engagement taking place for Years 9 – 11. The student survey carried out indicated that 73% of the 2025/6 in-borough cohort attended open evenings and 71% attended taster sessions. This illustrates the importance of these events in attracting applications. The proactiveness of the SBC in working with schools and colleges to promote post-16 provision in the previous two years has been acknowledged by the Post-16 Partnership.
- 4.49. The work of SBC to ensure providers have the information they need to support vulnerable learners into the right provider/course and build relationships has also been acknowledged. This assists in the transition to post-16 provision and retention. SBC Transitions Team has introduced person-centred planning from age 14 for students with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCPs) and those involved with social care. The Preparing for Adulthood Day that has been held proved to be an effective way of multi-agency working for supporting vulnerable learners and is therefore planned to be repeated.

Data Sharing

- 4.50. Despite the work being carried out there are still challenges in the support of vulnerable learners, including late identification of non-attenders and inconsistent application systems. Greater data sharing and clarity between schools and colleges is therefore needed and this assists not just vulnerable learners, but all young people, in the transition to post-16 providers. It can ensure that young people are integrated into the provider quickly and remove any barriers.
- 4.51. The sharing of data must take into account General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), and providers only collect data that they need to enable a smooth transition. There will be some young people and parent/carers who may be reluctant to consent to sharing their data for differing reasons, including that they wish to have a 'fresh start' Providers are explaining the reasons why the data is needed to reassure young people and their parents/carers in these cases.
- 4.52. The Transitions Work Strand have agreed to work collaboratively to strengthen support and improve processes in these areas, and a Borough-wide data framework using both school and college data management systems is being developed.

Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

- 4.53. NEET has risen in Stockton-on-Tees from 5.0% in 2020, 5.2% in 2023, to 7.4% in 2025. In April members were informed that NEET was 7.3%, and SBC was 127th of 151 Local Authorities. While the impact of additional staff resource in Leaving Care Team and Employment & Training Hub on the NEET rate for Care Experienced Young People is yet to be seen in the national data, there are early signs of impact at service level. However, smaller caseloads and increased proactive support in post-16 for those with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) has impacted the NEET rate, with both reducing (SEN Support from 21.5% in 2024 to 17.4% in 2025/EHCP from 18.9% in 2024 to 16.5% in 2025).
- 4.54. While there are national issues influencing NEET, including attendance and mental health amongst others, it is suggested that the significant increase of the post-16 cohort in Stockton-on-Tees is having an impact on the level of NEET in the borough, with there not being enough post-16 opportunities available. This has resulted in 16/17-year-olds competing with 18/19-year-olds for apprenticeships and employment opportunities, with the older cohort being more successful.
- 4.55. The OYPE review, noted in paragraph 4.29 is proposing a new SBC Careers service model and operational redesign to improve opportunities, strengthen transitions, and influence a reduction in NEET rates.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1. The Committee's review has noted that Stockton-on-Tees benefits from a broad and high-quality post-16 education offer, with a wide range of academic and vocational pathways available and a strong overall A-level pass rate.
- 5.2. The review found that the Post-16 Partnership has created an effective shared framework for strategic collaboration with four active work strands: Excellence for All, Communications & Marketing, Careers, and Transitions. Providers are now engaging in cross-college activity such as Teach Meets, Business Mentor/Excellence for All Programmes, industry speaker sessions, and shared employer intelligence. This has led to an emergence of a culture of genuine collaboration despite being competitors, and are already contributing to increased engagement, rising application numbers, and stronger alignment with local labour market needs.
- 5.3. The innovative practice taking place, e.g. Business Mentor Support and Skills for Success to improve confidence, employability skills and sector understanding, and Teach Meets to facilitate sharing of best practice to raise A*-B attainment, show early signs of strengthening outcomes and could be scaled borough-wide and subject-wide.
- 5.4. The Careers Network supports schools and colleges to meet statutory duties, reduce duplication and improve quality. It has made progress on four of the five priorities identified by schools and colleges: Creating a business directory, developing KS3 work experience activities, support KS4 work experience, create parent & carer career guidance. SBC Careers targeted support, dedicated

roles, smaller caseloads, person-centred planning from age 14 and programmes such as Youth Trailblazers are beginning to show positive outcomes.

- 5.5. The new school engagement toolkit aims to address inconsistencies in careers advice by ensuring all school staff can confidently promote the local offer. A central “jargon buster” is also being developed to assist with navigating the options available and avoid overwhelming students and parents.
- 5.6. Employer engagement has been strengthened, with providers receiving consistent labour-market intelligence and employers speaking directly to students to support real-world understanding and raise aspirations. Employer engagement is also shaping local provision, being involved in curriculum development and work placements.
- 5.7. Providers are engaging extensively with schools and there is a cohesive, collaborative, marketing approach in place-branding – e.g. Post 16 brochure, alumni stories and “live, work, play” messaging. Joint marketing efforts have begun to show impact, with significant increases in application and attendance at open days across in-borough providers.
- 5.8. However, the review highlighted that a number of challenges remain. Transition from secondary school to post-16 education is a risk point for retention, with a minority of pupils dropping out within the first three months of Year 12. Increased independence, academic challenge, transport issues (connectivity to all post-16 providers and cost), wellbeing, financial pressures and unmet expectations all contribute to disengagement. Poor course matching and unclear expectations increase the likelihood of early drop-out and NEET outcomes. There are inconsistent transition arrangements between schools and colleges and systems to flag declining attendance/engagement and prevent drop-out are not yet embedded consistently.
- 5.9. The Committee recognise that NEET levels are high with 7.5% of Year 12 and Year 13 students NEET or not known, placing Stockton-on-Tees among the highest level of NEET nationally. In addition, a growing post-16 cohort has increased competition for apprenticeships and entry-level jobs, especially between 16-17 and 18-19 year olds. Learners are increasingly choosing vocational pathways, which also have higher drop-out rates. Provider capacity and demand-led curriculum planning all require ongoing strategic oversight.
- 5.10. A major factor influencing post-16 destinations is transport with 82% of young people highlighting this when surveyed. Out of Borough providers can be more accessible in terms of public transport than in Borough providers, depending on where in the borough the young person resides. Friendship groups are another influencing factor in post-16 choices; however these can change during the transition and impact retention. In addition, mystery shopper exercises indicate that while out of borough colleges offer similar provision, incentive-based marketing and branding strategies influence student choice.
- 5.11. Early awareness and guidance using a shared language and messaging are critical, enabling young people to build their knowledge and understanding of the pathways available from when choosing their GCSE options in Year 9. While the Careers Network has made progress on four of its priorities, the Network has not yet focused on careers into the curriculum e.g. developing resources to explain how skills and qualities of subjects translate into the world of work, which would assist in the understanding of career pathways.

- 5.12. To address the issues highlighted by the review, the Committee recognises the importance of building on the strong foundations already in place. Continued strengthening of collaborative working and accessible communications approach, earlier careers education, and improved transitions support will be key to improving outcomes. In particular, ensuring that young people and their families have a clear understanding of local opportunities – and are able to access them without practical barriers – will be essential to increasing retention within the borough.
- 5.13. Overall, the Committee concludes that with sustained focus and collective commitment, there is a significant opportunity to further enhance post-16 provision in Stockton-on-Tees, improving participation, reducing NEET levels, and enabling more young people to achieve their potential while contributing to the borough's future economic growth.

Recommendations

5.14 The Committee recommends that:

1. Transition support is strengthened by developing a consistent borough-wide transition framework between schools and post-16 providers, including clear pre-enrolment guidance, earlier course matching, data sharing, and structured support during the first term/end of Year 12 when drop-out risk is highest.
2. Early warning systems for flagging declining attendance, behaviour, and attainment are embedded across all post-16 providers with clear escalation and intervention pathways are in place before disengagement reaches crisis point.
3. Collaborative initiatives that are showing signs of successfully assisting young people, such as Teach Meets, Skills for Success, and Business Mentor Support, are expanded to all providers and prioritising subjects with historically smaller student cohorts.
4. Communication between all providers and young people and their parents/carers regarding the Post-16 in-Borough offer is strengthened.
5. Careers education is embedded in to the curriculum in all schools and post-16 providers to ensure young people choose the right pathways for them and reduce early withdrawal by:
 - ensuring careers advice and guidance/post 16 options are available from Year 9 (or earlier) to enable young people to build their knowledge
 - developing resources and staff training to show how subject-specific knowledge and skills translate into employment, business and industry
 - give clear course expectations, progression routes and employment outcomes to reduce early withdrawal from and dissatisfaction with courses.
6. Labour-market intelligence and cohort growth data is utilised to plan academic, vocational and apprenticeship provision more strategically, to ensure capacity keeps pace with demand and competition between age groups does not disadvantage younger learners.
7. Cross-provider enrichment opportunities are broadened to not only create a more competitive offer compared with regional competitors but also raise aspirations.

8. Post-16 providers explore collaborative approaches and strategic networks to address transport barriers, highlighted as a significant influence on post-16 choice including connectivity to all in-Borough post-16 providers and cost, so young people can access efficient, cost effective in-borough provision.
9. Post-16 providers ensure that vocational courses provide coherent pathways to meet industry requirements

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Glossary of Terms

EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulations
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
OYPE	Opportunities for Young People in Employment
SEN	Special Educational Needs
TVCA	Tees Valley Combined Authority

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People Select Committee
Review of Procurement and Tendering Processes
Outline Scope

Scrutiny Chair (Project Director): Cllr Marilyn Surtees	Contact details: M.Surtees@stockton.gov.uk
Scrutiny Officer (Project Manager): Michelle Gunn	Contact details: Michelle.gunn@stockton.gov.uk
Departmental Link Officer: Martin Skipsey	Contact details: Martin.Skipsey@stockton.gov.uk
Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address? Procurement relates to how the Council purchases goods and works and therefore directly addresses the following Council plan priority: Priority five – A sustainable Council: We will ensure our council is financially sustainable and manages our assets effectively to enhance their local impact. We will be a well-run council across areas of our business and continue to improve outcomes for communities. The actual goods, services and works also support all other council priorities.	
What are the main issues and overall aim of this review? Procurement represents a significant proportion of the Council's annual expenditure and there is an expectation that the Council spends money efficiently, secure competitive prices, and demonstrate transparency in purchasing and the awarding of contracts. Robust procurement arrangements ensure high-quality services and infrastructure, can promote sustainable and environmentally responsible practices, and support local businesses and the local economy. The aim of the review will be to ensure procurement processes deliver value for money, are competitive, and transparent.	
The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry What is the legislation the Council must adhere to in procurement and tendering? What are the Council's contract procedure rules (part of the constitution)? What are the Council's arrangements, structures and procedures for procurement and tendering? What are the pre-procurement stages? How does the Council procure via external organisations e.g. NEPO? What is the breakdown of expenditure through procurement? How is best value duty met when procuring services and/or goods? How are labour costs and overheads within contracts assessed and challenged? How is social value maximised?	

How are decisions made on whether services are provided inhouse or procured? Does the Council procure services with other public sector organisations? What opportunities are there for (further) joint procurement? How often are contracts/procurement reviewed in order to determine best value?
Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work? Council, Cabinet
Expected duration of review and key milestones: Six months (reporting to Cabinet in January 2027) Approve scope and project plan – July 2026 Receive evidence – July 2026 – October 2026 Draft recommendations – November 2026 Final report – December 2026 Report to Cabinet – January 2027
What information do we need? Existing information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc.): A councillor's guide to procurement (2025 edition) Local Government Association Contract Procedure Rules Social Value Policy New information: Comparison with other local authorities

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?
Procurement	The legislative remit and Council processes Contract procedure rules Budget and spending areas (i.e. what the Council spends money on)
North East Purchasing Organisation (NEPO)	How the Council operates in the wider region How the Council compares to other Local Authorities in the region
LGA	Best practice in procurement processes used
Local Chamber of Commerce	Their experience of the Councils procurement process
How will this information be gathered? (e.g. financial baselining and analysis, benchmarking, site visits, face-to-face questioning, telephone survey, survey) Committee meetings, reports, desk-based research, survey	

How will key partners and the public be involved in the review?

Committee meetings, information submissions

How will the review help the Council meet the Public Sector Equality Duty?

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.

Public bodies must have due regard for advancing equality which includes:

- 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

Robust and well managed procurement and tendering arrangement contributes to the financial stability of the Council and thereby ensures SBC continues to deliver the services that communities need.

How will the review contribute towards the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, or the implementation of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy?

Robust and well managed procurement and tendering arrangement contributes to the financial stability of the Council and thereby ensures SBC continues to deliver the services that communities need.

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

Examining procurement processes and identifying whether there are any areas where these may be strengthened will ensure the Council is delivering value for money and processes are transparent.

Project Plan

Key Task	Details/Activities	Date	Responsibility
Scoping of Review	Information gathering	June 2026	Scrutiny Officer Link Officer
Tri-Partite Meeting	Meeting to discuss aims and objectives of review	23.06.26	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	06.07.26	Select Committee
Publicity of Review	Determine whether Communications Plan needed	TBC	Link Officer, Scrutiny Officer
Obtaining Evidence	Background evidence Evidence from Procurement Evidence from NEPO/LGA & Local Chamber of Commerce	06.07.26 07.09.26 05.10.26	Select Committee
Members decide recommendations and findings	Review summary of findings and formulate draft recommendations	02.11.26	Select Committee
Circulate Draft Report to Stakeholders	Circulation of Report	November 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	07.12.26	Select Committee, Cabinet Member, Director
Consideration of Report by Executive Scrutiny Committee	Consideration of report	19.01.27	Executive Scrutiny Committee
Report to Cabinet/Approving Body	Presentation of final report with recommendations for approval to Cabinet	21.01.27	Cabinet / Approving Body

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Scrutiny Review of Procurement & Tendering Processes

Context and Background

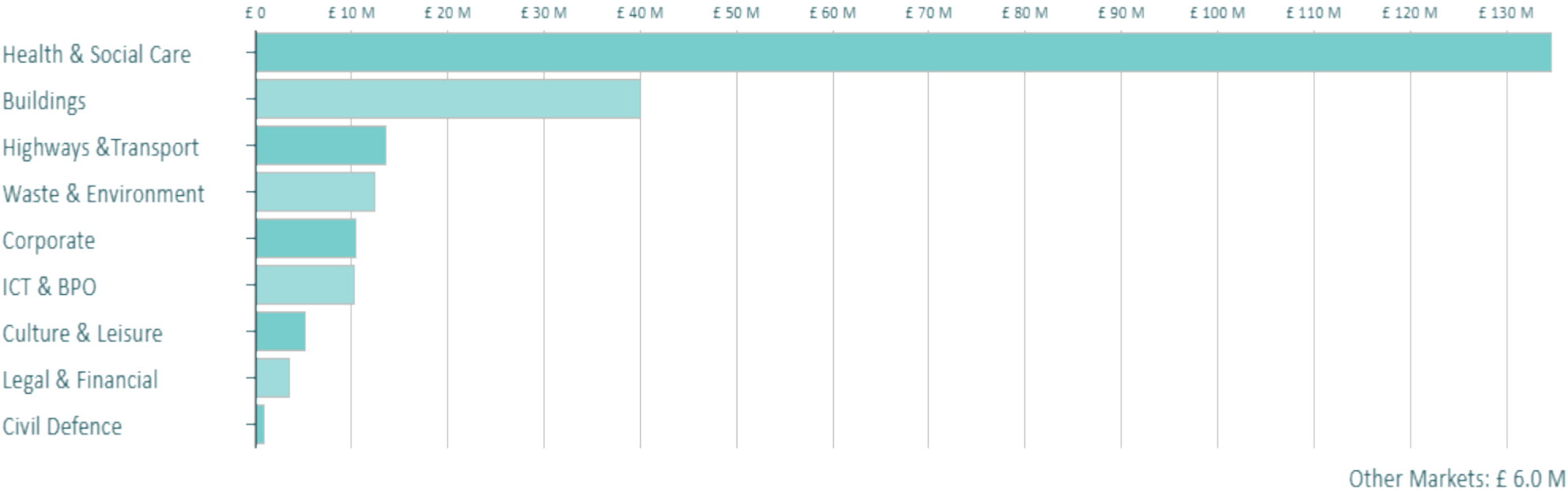
Context and Background

- **Strategic context** – national and local economy, innovation, community benefits (SME, VCSE)
- **Public money** – public procurement
- **Regulated activity** – Procurement Act 2023, Public Contract Regs 2015, Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, Best Value Act (Local Government Act 1999)

Context and Background

- **Constitution** – Contract Procedure Rules (standing orders), role of members/ officers
- **Goods, services and works** – the breadth of what we buy
- **The categorization conundrum** – spend analysis

Context and Background



Context and Background

- **2025/26 Expenditure - £237m**
- **Local, regional and national** – policy, practice, expenditure, buying organisations
- **SME/ VCSE** – expenditure

Context and Background

- **Social value** – policy, practice
- **Phase 2 Reviews** – Procurement of Non-social care goods and services
- **Contract register** – the bible

People Select Committee – Work Programme 2026- 2027

Date (2pm unless stated)	Topic	Attendance
Monday 13 April 2026	Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Provision 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 - Working Group Lead for Transitions Monitoring: Progress Update – Scrutiny Review of Disabled Facilities Grant Overview & Performance - 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 Summary of Evidence / Draft Recommendations	Vanessa Housley & Aishah Waite
Monday 6 July 2026	Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Provision - Final Report Scrutiny Review of Procurement and Tendering Processes – Scope and Project Plan	Vanessa Housley & Aishah Waite Martin Skipsey
Monday 7 September 2026	Monitoring: Progress Update – Scrutiny Review of Partnership Working in Early Help Xentrall Annual Report	Kellie Wigley & Aishah Waite Ian Coxon
Monday 5 October 2026		
Monday 2 November 2026	Monitoring: Progress Update – Scrutiny Review of Disabled Facilities Grant	Sam Dixon
Monday 7 December 2026	Overview & Performance - Strategy, Systems & Improvement - Customer Services & Digital - Culture, Leisure & Events	Cllr Norma Stephenson, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Kellie Hopkins, 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