

Cabinet

A meeting of Cabinet was held on Thursday 12th June 2025.

Present: Cllr Lisa Evans (Leader), Cllr Pauline Beall (Cabinet Member), Cllr Clare Besford (Cabinet Member), Cllr Nigel Cooke (Cabinet Member), Cllr Richard Eglington (Cabinet Member), Cllr Paul Rowling (Cabinet Member) and Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE (Cabinet Member).

Officers: Peter Bell, Julie Butcher, Angela Connor, Garry Cummings, Jane Edmonds, Kirsty Grundy and Majella McCarthy.

Also in attendance: Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Lynn Hall and Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Members of BMBF.

Apologies: None.

CAB/15/25 Evacuation Procedure

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and the evacuation procedure was noted.

CAB/16/25 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

CAB/17/25 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2025.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2025 be approved.

CAB/18/25 Bright Minds Big Futures

Cabinet received a report (and the accompanying presentation) that provided an update on annual BMBF activity.

Bright Minds Big Future (BMBF) was a youth-led movement working together with the Council to make the Borough a great place to grow up.

The presentation accompanying the report was delivered by representatives of the BMBF team.

BMBF welcome the opportunity to present their progress and achievements for 2024/25. The report also looks ahead and identifies future projects and opportunities.

Cabinet noted the two key themes BMBF were focussing on for 2024/2026:-

- Health and Wellbeing and Community Safety which came out of the consultation with over 6,000 young people during the Mark Your Mark Campaign.

The presentation included the excellent progress that had been made in the last 12 months. Some notable examples included:

- BMBF recruited 20 young people to be SBC Correspondents at SIRF.
- Delivery of the 'Second Chance to Dance Event' providing over 30 dresses and suits to young people (to enable young people who may otherwise have struggled to attend their Prom).
- Social action work including making up and distributing over 60 free goodie bags to families through the 'Kit Out the Borough' campaign.

In addition to the above achievements, BMBF members had also been contributing to a range of projects and initiatives including:

- Environmental work through the Youth Climate Coalition.
- Health & wellbeing initiatives.
- Building links with Council services such as the Leaving Care Team along with other partners including Youth United Stockton Alliance (YUSA), which was a collective of key partners who had come together to form an alliance to support the sustainability of high-quality open access youth provision across Stockton-on-Tees.

Over the last 6 months, a recruitment campaign had been underway to increase BMBF membership. The recruitment drive also continued to ensure that BMBF was representative of young people across the Borough.

Cabinet also noted that the Chair of BMBF, Ethan Gatenby was the Member of Youth Parliament (elected through the Make Your Mark Campaign).

Looking ahead, Health & Wellbeing and Community Safety campaigns would be a key focus for BMBF. BMBF members will do this through project groups and task & finish style groups. This would enable young people to choose to work on projects that they had a keen interest in. There would also be a continuing focus on recruiting new members to ensure BMBF remained representative of young people across the Borough.

CAB/19/25 A Children's Safeguarding Hub for Stockton-on-Tees

Consideration was given to a report on a Children's Safeguarding Hub for Stockton-on-Tees.

The Children's Hub (CHub) served as the first point of contact for anyone concerned about the safety or wellbeing of a child or young person in Stockton-on-Tees. Since 2016 the CHub had been managed in partnership with Hartlepool Borough Council. The multi-agency front door included Hartlepool and Stockton local authorities, Cleveland Police, Tees, Esk and Wear Valley Trust, a Local Authority Designated Officer, and representatives from 0-19 services delivered by Harrogate District Foundation Trust.

The report asked Cabinet to agree to the disaggregation of the Children's multi-agency hub, and to bringing services in-house within Stockton-on-Tees. This would ensure

that the Council continued to deliver its commitment to the Powering Our Futures Mission by improving service response to communities and formed part of the work programme surrounding the Early Intervention and Prevention portfolio.

The operational context of the CHub had evolved significantly since its inception. The service had experienced a substantial increase in demand, with Stockton referrals surpassing national and regional averages. Economic pressures, the cost-of-living crisis, and the aftermath of COVID-19 had also contributed to the growing complexity of needs of people referred to the hub.

Separating from the integrated front door to an in-house offer aligns more closely with national reforms and the strategic direction of the Council. This transition supported the national policy direction to transform children's social care by improving outcomes, keeping families together, and enhancing localised service delivery. It ensured that the CHub can better reflect local needs, partnership arrangements, and Stockton-on-Tees specific strategies for reform.

The national policy aimed to transform children's social care by improving outcomes, keeping families together, enhancing information sharing, and fostering partnership and multi-agency collaboration. Key policy documents outlining the framework for change included:

- Working Together to Safeguard Children (DFE 2023)
- Children's Social Care: National Framework (DFE 2024)
- Families First Partnership programme (DFE 2025)
- Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (Government Bill 2025)

In March 2025 the government issued guidance to support the implementation of these reforms. This guidance encompassed a wide range of changes affecting children's services, from early help to safeguarding, tailored to the needs of local communities. Consequently, the future operation of the CHub must align with local needs, partnership arrangements, and Stockton-on-Tees specific reform strategies.

In alignment with national reforms, the Council's Powering Our Futures (POF) programme had prioritised Early Intervention and Prevention, Partnerships (Team Stockton), Data, Digital, Technology, and Communities.

In April 2024, a cabinet report included a Project Initiation Document for Early Intervention and Prevention (EIP), the EIP programme was focussed on embedding prevention and early intervention across the Local Authority, improving outcomes and reducing the need for statutory services. Bringing the children's front door back into Stockton was a fundamental element of the Early Intervention and Prevention (EIP) mission and the broader Children's Social Care Reforms. This approach aligned with the overarching vision to support families at the earliest opportunity, addressing challenges proactively to reduce the need for statutory interventions.

This was an opportunity to reflect on the current delivery model for how children and their families access services, aiming to improve outcomes for children, young people, and families in Stockton-on-Tees. A Stockton-on-Tees CHub will:

- Support the wider transformation of children's social care as mandated by national guidance and outlined in the children's transformation programme.

- Provide SBC senior leaders with the oversight and accountability needed to design and manage services that respond to local needs and systems.
- Enhance direct links with partners, fostering wider engagement and relationship-building, which will build confidence in our collective response and contribute to improved demand management and decision-making.
- Better utilise resources within the broader children's early help system.
- Strengthen connections to the wider corporate approach to Powering Our Futures and Transformation.
- Enable real-time updates on data and intelligence, improving performance and outcomes management, and facilitating ongoing service improvements.

Extensive discussions with leaders of Children's Services at Hartlepool Borough Council had highlighted that, in the context of national reforms, the current arrangements for the CHub were not fully aligned with Hartlepool's nor Stockton-on-Tees' strategic direction. While the CHub had been an integral part of the Children's System North of Tees, the evolving operational circumstances suggested that a separation of the joint arrangements was necessary. This change would allow both Authorities to better align with their respective strategic goals and the broader national reforms.

Partners delivering services from the CHub had engaged in early discussions regarding the future of the North of Tees CHub arrangements. Partners had also been engaged in discussions which encompassed future partnership visions for Stockton, aligning with national reforms.

There would be an extensive process to disaggregate from the CHub, including process reviews, audits, demand and data analysis of the current service. This would inform future arrangements, identify staffing needs, and determine the CHub's location, which would be considered by the Asset Management group. Additionally, any potential transfer of staff would be carefully managed to ensure continuity and alignment with the new operational model.

Future models would be co-designed and developed with partners, the workforce and children and families themselves in the context of the wider reforms. There would be consultation and engagement exercises and an in-depth communication and engagement plan to ensure a seamless transition.

The estimated start date for the new arrangements will be by 1 April 2026, further updates and recommendations would be provided to Cabinet once the more detailed design work has been completed.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The disaggregation of the Children's Hub from Hartlepool be approved and the front door to services for children and young people and their families to be brought in-house and directly delivered by Stockton-on-Tees Children's Services, alongside partner organisations.
2. Cabinet receive an update on future development as part of the wider Children's Services reforms including recommendation on the date in which delegation of the function will occur.

CAB/20/25 Accelerating affordable housing delivery ('A quality home for all')

Consideration was given to a report on Accelerating Affordable Housing Delivery ('A quality home for all').

A previous report was presented to Cabinet (12.9.2024) which outlined the Governments ambition to increase the delivery of quality affordable and social housing and to bring forward investment to help deliver “the biggest increase in affordable housing building in a generation”, whilst also acknowledging the role affordable housing has in supporting economic growth and as a key enabler for local leader to manage local housing pressures. The September 2024 Cabinet report also highlighted that the Council, like most local authorities was experiencing increased demand for affordable housing at a time of limited supply and this was impacting on the ability to prevent homelessness and support vulnerable adults and care leavers to secure independent accommodation. Cabinet subsequently agreed to support an option appraisal which would consider the potential opportunities available to the Council to accelerate affordable housing delivery in the Borough. This was accompanied by a scrutiny review which was reported to Cabinet in April 2025. The report details the outcome of this appraisal and seeks approval for next steps.

The report highlighted the following key areas:-

- Current challenges
- Key headlines
- Accelerating Affordable Housing Option Appraisal
- Affordable housing sites (initial phase)
- Commuted sum monies

The provision of a mixed tenure affordable housing offer (which will provide 'a quality home for all') would be considered as an integral part of the Councils regeneration ambitions across Central Stockton, North Thornaby, Billingham Town Centre and the Care and Health Innovation Zone). However potential sites would also start to come forward through the ongoing work to rationalise council building / assets (as referenced in paragraph 15 of the report). Given the current housing needs and the limited additional units projected to come forward via third parties in the immediate future, it was imperative that the Council moved forward with the Hybrid Delivery Model as quickly as possible. On this basis Cabinet was asked to approve 'in principle' an initial phase of smaller sites for the purpose of affordable housing delivery these were:

- (a) Raleigh Road (vacant potential in-fill site)
- (b) Londonderry Road (vacant potential in-fill site)
- (c) Stirling House (once vacant)
- (d) Parkside House (once vacant)
- (e) Thornaby Baths (once vacant/following the opening of the Thornaby Pavilion & Pool)

It was estimated that the release of the above sites for affordable units would deliver an initial phase of between 67-114 new homes. Subject to Cabinet approval, work would commence to explore the quantum of the affordable housing that could be delivered on each site (in terms of specification, type, tenure and density), site feasibility work and engagement with potential partners. This would inform which of the Hybrid Delivery Models was best placed to successfully bring the site forward.

The principle of using council land for the delivery of housing was set out in the Strategic Asset Management Plan which was agreed by Cabinet in December 2024 (decision record CAB77/24). The Strategic Asset Management Plan sets out the decision making framework for all vacant Council assets and established housing as a priority consideration. Not all sites would be suitable for housing and there were competing priorities for the development of land for economic, community or council use. As noted in paragraph 13 of the report the acceleration of the delivery of housing was a key objective of the Council's wider regeneration ambitions and the delivery of blueprints for North Thornaby, Central Stockton and Billingham. The Council would continue to promote residentially driven town centre regeneration using council land, working with public sector partners and with private sector developers to ensure that growth across the Borough delivered mixed tenure, good quality housing which meet the needs of residents. This included increasing the number of affordable homes delivered but also needed to consider affordability for people across a wide range of income brackets (delivering a 'A quality home for all').

Work undertaken by Place Select Committee and the Affordable Housing Option Appraisal had identified that the market was not at this time responding to address the Boroughs housing needs (in terms of the number, specification, type and tenure of affordable housing units being delivered). Given the Councils landownership and economic & regeneration ambitions there was an opportunity as outlined within the body of the report to step into this space and ensure the delivery of a pipeline of affordable units (type, specification and tenure) which directly addressed housing need, which was not reliant on a third party. The delivery of affordable units would also make a significant contribution to the Councils residential and town centre regeneration ambitions and the annual housing planning target.

In addition to the next steps detailed within the report, the Council was also forging relationship with both Homes England and the Tees Valley Combined Authority to ensure the Council was best placed for future funding as / when announcements were made.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The outcome of the accelerating affordable housing option appraisal, specifically the Hybrid Delivery Model be supported (as detailed in paragraph 11 of the report).
2. The initial phase of sites outlined within paragraph 13,14 and 15 of the report for delivery of affordable housing be approve 'in principle'.
3. The use of S106 commuted sum monies (as detailed in paragraph 16 and 17 of the report) be approved to deliver urgently needed affordable housing (generally smaller self-contained accommodation units).
4. Delegated approval be given to the Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration to approve the preferred direct purchase model to secure additional affordable homes (as detailed in paragraphs 16 and 17 of the report).

In accordance with the Council's Constitution or previous practice the minutes of the meeting of the bodies indicated below were submitted to members for consideration:-

SSP – 19 March 2025

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings detailed in the appendices be received.