

## Cabinet

A meeting of Cabinet was held on Thursday 18th September 2025.

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

**Officers:** Peter Bell, Sarah Bowman-Abouna (DoPH), Julie Butcher, Tracey Carter, Angela Connor, Jane Edmonds, Mike Greene, Kirsty Grundy, Clare Harper, Gemma Jackson, Reuben Kench, Majella McCarthy, Corninne Moore (Community Svs, Environment and Culture) and Chris Renahan

**Also in attendance:** Cllr Michelle Bendelow, Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley and Cllr Shakeel Hussain

**Apologies:** , Cllr Richard Eglington (Cabinet Member)

### **CAB/38/25 Evacuation Procedure**

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

### **CAB/39/25 Minutes**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2025.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2025 be approved.

### **CAB/40/25 Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared.

### **CAB/41/25 MTFP Update (Quarter 1 2025/26)**

Consideration was given to a report that summarised the Council's financial performance and position at the end of the first quarter of the 2025/26 financial year. The Powering Our Futures programme, and in particular the transformation mission had identified savings of £5.8m by 2026/27 to date. The updated savings target was £1.35m in 2025/26 and £2.256m in 2026/27. The transformation programme, alongside the wider Powering our Futures Programme, would continue to look to address the budget gap, alongside ensuring improvements to services to local residents.

The financial position for the Council for the first quarter of the financial year (to 30th June 2025) highlighted a projected overspend of £1.684m against the budget. Growing demand for Council services and the increased cost of delivery was putting pressure on several budget headings. Work was underway to look at ways to mitigate

this projected overspend and the position would continue to be closely monitored and managed throughout the remainder of the financial year.

The financial challenges facing Stockton reflected a wider national picture, with councils across the country experiencing significant and well-documented pressures. Stockton had managed these pressures responsibly, using earmarked reserves over recent years to support the Medium Term Financial Plan and maintain stability during a period of exceptional strain. Looking ahead, reliance on reserves alone was not sustainable. Work was under way on the 2026/27 budget and the updated MTFP, ensuring that planning was proactive and focused on maintaining financial resilience. Cabinet would continue to receive regular updates on progress and the measures being developed.

The report also presented an update on the Capital Programme.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The update to the Medium Term Financial Plan and the current level of General Fund balances be noted.
2. The revised Capital Programme at Appendix A be noted.

**CAB/42/25 Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Annual Complaints Report 2024/25 and the new Complaints Policy 2024/25**

Consideration was given to a report that provided Cabinet with details of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) annual review letter for 2024/25. The annual review letter detailed that there were 30 enquiries submitted to the Ombudsman during 2024/25 (a reduction from the previous year), 8 met the threshold for a detailed investigation by the Ombudsman. Of the 8 complaint investigations, all were upheld. All recommendations made by the Ombudsman, following their investigations, had been accepted and implemented by the Council.

Secondly, the report provided details of the Council's new corporate Complaints Policy to be implemented from 1 January 2026. The new policy was aligned to the new LGSCO Complaint Handling Code. The new Policy outlined that there would be two stages in the new corporate complaints process; Stage 1 was 10 working days and Stage 2 was 20 working days. Complaints would continue to be resolved at the earliest opportunity.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The report which sets out that the Council has fully complied with the recommendations from complaints investigated by the Ombudsman be noted.
2. The Council's new Complaints Policy be implemented from 1 January 2026.

**CAB/43/25 Powering our Future - Regeneration Mission - Town Hall and Debenhams**

Consideration was given to a report that provided an update on the Powering Our Futures Regeneration mission delivery of the Central Stockton and North Thornaby Blueprint. The report included future opportunities for use of existing assets in Stockton town centre which were deferred at the July Cabinet meeting.

In July 2024, Cabinet approved a Blueprint which set out an exciting and innovative vision for the future development of Central Stockton and North Thornaby areas. The blueprint outlined transformational change over the next 25 years by creating prosperous, vibrant places, fit for future generations by delivering modern, mixed-use neighbourhoods and a thriving town centre, helping to make sure it was a safe and welcoming place where people want to work, live and visit. It focused on eight key intervention areas in Central Stockton and North Thornaby which were illustrated within the report.

The report provided an update on interventions to support retail in Stockton Town Centre and commercial opportunities for existing Council land and assets including the following:-

- Stockton Waterfront
- Town Centre Living
- Stockton Town Hall
- Debenhams
- Small Business Space

It was proposed that the final allocations between the three schemes be delegated to the Director of Regeneration & Inclusive Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport to develop a business case and designs for potential future uses.

RESOLVED that the previously agreed allocation of £6.5m be delegated to the Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport to:

- a. Undertake works associated with Stockton Town Hall to bring it back into active use.
- b. Create an enabling budget to develop options and engage the market in opportunities to bring the former Debenhams building back into occupation.
- c. Upgrade Council owned shops in Stockton town centre to create spaces suitable for small businesses.

## **CAB/44/25 Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy**

Consideration was given to a report on the Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 required local housing authorities to adopt a strategic approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping. A review of the Council's current strategy had been undertaken informed by engagement with key partners (internal, statutory and VCSE sector) and those with lived experience of homelessness.

The Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 reflected a whole-system approach, working collaboratively with partners, communities, and individuals to deliver sustainable solutions to both prevent and address the root causes of homelessness and rough sleeping.

The Stockton-on-Tees Plan set out the Council's vision for the future of the Borough. The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 aligns with this Plan, specifically the council's aim to ensure that the diverse communities live happy and healthy lives and that the Council supports those who were experiencing poverty and disadvantage.

In developing the refreshed strategy, consideration had been given to the challenges faced by the Council. Over the past four years (2021/22 – 2024/25) an average of 2742 individuals presented per year to the Homelessness Service, with an annual average of 2,297 Homelessness Reduction Act assessments being completed during the same period. Increasing demand from those who were experiencing or threatened with homelessness was not isolated to the Borough, rather it was a national issue. The demand for homelessness services could be attributed to multiple factors including:

- cost of living challenges
- the limited supply of social and affordable Registered Provider housing
- the lack of affordable housing options in the private rented sector and
- wider social issues affecting the complexity of cases (vulnerabilities associated with drug and alcohol use, domestic abuse and offending behaviour for example).

During the same period (2021/22 to 2024/25) demand for temporary accommodation also increased, again consistent with national trends. Whilst the council had arranged commissioned temporary accommodation services, demand had on occasions outstripped this supply, resulting in placements in 'emergency accommodation' (non-commissioned accommodation including the use of B&B and hotel accommodation). 301 single people and 82 families were accommodated in emergency temporary accommodation in 2024/2025. In all instances the Homelessness Service worked to minimise the length of an individual / family stay in emergency accommodation.

In addition to preventing and supporting those who experienced homelessness the strategy also aimed to support individuals who may be sleeping rough. Whilst the numbers of those who sleep rough within the Borough were not high, this was the most visible and often extreme form of homelessness. Whilst homelessness may be the presenting issue, many individuals had complex lives shaped by personal vulnerabilities such as mental health, substance and alcohol abuse, trauma and an offending history. These circumstances required more than a 'housing solution'. Rather a personalised approach tailored to meet an individual's needs, involving a range of statutory and VCSE services (i.e. drug and alcohol support, social care and health professionals and community-based support services).

The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping 2025-2030 Strategy sets a vision "to minimise homelessness, eliminate rough sleeping and ensure residents were supported by relevant partners to access a place they were able to call home". This vision reflected the Council's determination to end homelessness within the Borough. To achieve this, the strategy outlined four strategic priorities designed to ensure the Council was equipped to address current and future challenges. These priorities also supported the Homelessness Service and its internal and external providers in delivering positive outcomes for our most vulnerable residents.

The 4 strategic priorities were:

- 1) Prevent and relieve homelessness

- 2) Prevent rough sleeping
  - 3) Efficient use of temporary and supported accommodation, and
  - 4) Working in partnership
- Consultation

To ensure that the strategy was reflective and shaped by partners (across all sectors) and importantly those with lived experience of homelessness a targeted consultation exercise was carried out. This included a survey (which included all those with an 'open' homelessness prevention case), focus group activity and an engagement session held within one of the commissioned temporary accommodation sites to facilitate direct conversations with those with lived experience of homelessness.

The consultation survey sought views on the four strategic priorities. The high-level results of the survey were summarised within the report.

The survey findings demonstrated support for the 4 proposed strategic priorities.

To ensure effective monitoring of progress against each of the 4 strategic priorities, an action plan would be developed to accompany the strategy. The Action Plan would be reviewed internally and in collaboration with stakeholder partners through the Homelessness Forum as the Council recognised that achieving the best possible outcomes for those who were homeless or at risk of homelessness required ongoing partnership working.

RESOLVED that the Stockton-on-Tees Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 be approved.

## **CAB/45/25 Tees Valley Waste Project - Energy Reduction Facility (ERF) Update**

Consideration was given to a report on the Tees Valley Waste Project - Energy Reduction Facility (ERF).

The five Tees Valley Authorities, Durham County Council and Newcastle City Council (together "the Councils") have joined together to create an opportunity for a contractor to design, build, operate and finance a new Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) to be located in the Tees Valley.

A Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) would be created, which would be a limited company owned by all 7 councils, to enter into the contract with the preferred bidder, Viridor. The SPV would manage the contract throughout the design, build, operation and financing of the ERF.

Cabinet had previously made the principal decisions to progress the joint waste facility and now a number of additional, ancillary legal agreements were required to progress the scheme to financial completion, to implement the project and ensure it's ongoing good governance.

In July 2020 Cabinet approved the First Inter Authority Agreement between the five Tees Valley Authorities, Durham County Council and Newcastle City Council to agree the governance arrangements between them in order to pursue a joint waste facility and approved the commencement of the procurement process to procure a contractor

to design, build, operate and finance the ERF. The Cabinet Report of 16 July 2020 contained more details.

In March 2022 Cabinet approved the creation of the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) and delegated the authority for the entering into of the Shareholder's Agreement and the Waste Supply and Support Agreement between the Council's and the SPV, and delegated the authority for the SPV to award the contract, enter into the Project Agreement with the successful contractor and the lease for the land with STDC (Teesworks) on which the ERF would be built.

The March 2022 decision by Cabinet also delegated authority to officers to enter into two Guarantees, one to the SPV for the Project Agreement and the second to provide a guarantee that the SPV will meet its requirements under the lease. Cabinet further delegated authority to finalise and agree the Business Plan and sufficient resources to allow the SPV to reach financial close and to monitor and manage the contract on behalf of the Councils.

The Cabinet Report of 17 March 2022 contained more details.

The Council's had selected a Preferred Bidder for the contract, Viridor, so the project was moving towards financial completion.

The documents in paragraphs 1 to 3 had been progressing and were almost ready to complete, however DLA Piper LLP, on behalf of the Council's, were producing the associated and ancillary suite of documents needed to ensure the governance of the contract and its future monitoring and management.

The Council was required to have a Director on the Board of the SPV to represent the interests of the council and would require the authority to make Board decisions without needing to return to Cabinet or the approval of a delegated officer before each decision can be made. This would effectively be the same authority that the Director of Environment, Leisure and Culture had to manage and monitor waste disposal contract.

Each of the 7 Councils would acquire one share each in the SPV which would entitle them to one vote each. It was proposed that the Council would be a Shareholder and therefore would require a Shareholder Representative to make decisions on behalf of the Council in it's role as shareholder in the company. SPV decisions would be made by the Management Team, appointed Board Director or Shareholder, the governance of which would be set out in the Shareholder's Agreement, Second Inter Authority Agreement and articles of association of the SPV.

In parallel with financial close being reached the First Inter Authority Agreement would end. The Waste Supply and Support Agreement and Shareholder Agreement would govern the management and monitoring of the contract.

Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council would be providing support services, such as Finance, HR, Legal and IT services, amongst others, to the SPV therefore a Service Level Agreement between Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council and the SPV was proposed, along with a secondment agreement to second officers from Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council to the SPV.

Whilst Cabinet had approved the Council providing a Guarantee to the SPV with regard to the Project Agreement the SPV would also need to provide a similar guarantee to the contractor that the SPV would comply with its obligations under the Project Agreement.

Hartlepool Borough Council entered into an Option to lease the land from STDC (Teesworks) for the land on which the ERF would be built. Once the SPV had been formed and financial close reached Hartlepool would novate (transfer) the option agreement to the SPV.

A side deed between the SPV and South Tees Development Ltd, Teesworks and South Tees Development Corporation would set out how wider site issues for the remainder of the STDC estate would be dealt with, for example, abnormal loads, fly tipping and service charges.

The environmental deed, which would form part of the Lease of the site, would deal specifically with contamination and how it would be dealt with, by whom etc, should any contamination be identified.

Whilst Cabinet had approved the Council providing a Guarantee to the SPV with regard to the Lease from STDC , the SPV would also need to provide a similar guarantee to the contractor that the SPV would comply with its obligations under the sub-lease from the SPV to the contractor.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The Assistant Director – Community Services and Transport, Craig Willows, be appointed as Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's Director on the Board of the SPV and to authorise them, and any successors, to take all decisions as set out in the SPV agreements any approved Articles of Association, and associated documents for the good governance of the SPV and ERF.
2. The Council be authorised subscribing for shares in the SPV.
3. The Council be endorsed being the Shareholder in the SPV and the Section 151 Officer be appointed as the Shareholder Representative and to authorise that shareholder representative to appoint an alternate representative to act as their substitute or deputy and authorise the Shareholder Representative and their alternate to make decisions under the Shareholder Agreement, articles of association etc including the making of shareholder resolutions on behalf of the Council.
4. Delegated authority be given to the Director of Community Services, Environment and Culture in consultation with the Director of Corporate Services and Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture to enter into the following agreements on behalf of the Council
  - a. The Shareholder Agreement
  - b. The Second Inter Authority Agreement
5. Delegated authority be given to the Director of Community Services, Environment and Culture in consultation with the Director of Corporate Services and Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture to authorise the LA SPV to enter into the following agreements:-

- a. Shareholders Agreement
- b. Service Level Agreement
- c. Secondment Agreement
- d. Council Guarantee of the Project Agreement
- e. Novation of the Option Agreement
- f. Side Deed with the estate owner
- g. Environmental Deed
- h. Lease Guarantee

6. Delegated authority be given to the Director of Community Services, Environment and Culture in consultation with the Director of Corporate Services, Chief Finance Officer and Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture to enter into all other necessary agreements or legal documents on behalf of the Council or the SPV to enable the project to reach financial completion and monitor and manage the contract.

### **CAB/46/25 Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Plan**

Consideration was given to a report on the Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Plan.

Local authority partnerships had a statutory duty to submit a Youth Justice Plan relating to their provision of youth justice services (YJSs). Section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 set out the youth justice partnerships responsibilities in producing a plan. It stated that it was the duty of each local authority, in consultation with partner agencies, to formulate and implement an annual youth justice plan, setting out how YJSs in their area were to be provided and funded, how they would operate, and what functions would be carried out.

The Youth Justice Plan reported on the vision, strategy, governance, leadership and partnership arrangements. It reflected and built upon good performance against key national performance measures. It also documented key themes around child first principles, evidence-based practice, prevention and diversion and our work with victims.

The Youth Justice Plan was produced after consultation with the partnership which includes the Police, Probation, Health and Education.

The Plan built upon the work done throughout 24/25. The document outlined six key strategic objective for the forthcoming year. These were:

- 1) Help children stay out of the criminal justice system.
- 2) To reduce reoffending.
- 3) Reduce the use of custody and prioritise effective resettlement.
- 4) Continue to strengthen our response to Serious Youth Violence and Child Exploitation.
- 5) Focus on reducing exclusions, improving school attendance and provide post 16 opportunities.
- 6) To continue to develop our interventions and our child friendly space.

RECOMMENDED to Council that Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Plan for 2025/26 be approved.

### **CAB/47/25 School Term and Holiday Dates 2026/2027**

Consideration was given to a report on the School Term and Holiday Dates 2026/2027.

School employers were required to set the term dates of their school year. Employers were:

- the Local Authority in maintained, voluntary controlled and maintained special schools.
- the Governing Body in foundation and voluntary aided schools.
- Multi Academy Trusts, academies and free schools.

In line with statutory requirements and the protocol agreed in 2008, consideration had been given to compile a set of term and holiday dates for schools in the Borough.

Officers consulted with colleagues from all neighbouring authorities to endeavour to reach consensus on a proposed model for the academic year.

The proposed dates for 2026/2027 were attached to the report.

As part of the consultation process these documents were duly circulated to schools/academies and all other relevant parties, including Diocesan Authorities and Trade Unions/Teaching Associations. There were no comments received, details were attached to the report.

To date the neighbouring authorities that had published their dates had endorsed the proposed matrix for 2026/2027. This level of agreement between authorities would relieve many of the cross-boundary issues that some families had suffered in the past.

RESOLVED that the school term and holiday dates 2026/2027 shown at Appendix 1 of the report, be agreed.

## **CAB/48/25 AI Strategic Approach**

Consideration was given to a report AI Strategic Approach.

The Council was embarking on the development of an updated Digital Strategy, designed to harness technology and innovation to improve services, efficiency, and public engagement across the council. This would be scheduled for presentation to Cabinet at a forthcoming meeting.

Recognising that artificial intelligence was a rapidly emerging and evolving area of work, the AI Strategic Approach had been developed to promote the safe, appropriate, and responsible use of these technologies. It aligns AI initiatives with the Council's broader transformation agenda, supporting the Powering Our Future Programme and helping to maximise resources to deliver better services for our communities.

The report provided Cabinet with an overview of the Council's strategic approach to Artificial Intelligence (AI). It outlined the vision, objectives, and key initiatives that would guide the responsible and ethical implementation of AI across services. The strategic approach aimed to enhance service delivery, improve operational efficiency, and support data-driven decision-making while upholding transparency, inclusivity, and environmental sustainability.

The AI Strategic Approach set out a vision for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council to become an AI-enabled organisation, empowering staff and improving services through ethical and sustainable AI use.

Strategic objectives included:

- Enhancing service delivery through automation and personalisation,
- Improving operational efficiency and achieving cost savings.
- Supporting data-driven decision-making with robust governance.
- Promoting ethical, transparent, and inclusive AI practices.
- Developing staff skills and fostering a culture of innovation.

Key initiatives included:

- AI-powered customer service (e.g. chatbots, voice recognition).
- Intelligent Process Automation (IPA) for back-office functions.
- Predictive analytics for service demand and risk management.
- AI tools for compliance, decision support, and staff empowerment.

Implementation would follow a phased roadmap: Discovery, Pilots, Scaling and Integration, and Continuous Improvement. Projects would be governed and reported through the Powering Our Futures Programme, Technical aspects managed through Digital Service Group (DSG), ensuring strategic council-wide oversight of AI developments.

The AI Strategic Approach was fully aligned with the Council's Powering Our Future Programme. Its primary driver was to ensure the best use of resources to deliver improved, efficient, and responsive services to communities.

The strategic approach had been developed in collaboration with the Digital Services Group (DSG), Corporate Management Team, and key service leads. Staff and stakeholder engagement would continue through pilot projects and targeted training programmes, ensuring ongoing involvement at every stage.

The next steps included identifying pilot projects that aligned with the objectives set out in the strategic approach and launching these pilots within identified service areas. Alongside this, the establishment of the AI Ethics Group and a governance framework would ensure responsible oversight. Aligned with the Colleagues Mission, the Council would support staff ensuring the workforce was equipped with the skills needed for the future. This included upskilling staff to work confidently with new technologies and adapt to changing ways of working, fostering a deeper understanding of the technology's uses and implications. Alongside this, as part of the council's wider transformation agenda, staff will work with communities ensuring that the benefits of AI were inclusive and contribute to reducing digital inequality.

The strategic approach would be reviewed annually, with updates presented to Cabinet as required, ensuring that the council's AI initiatives remain aligned with broader objectives and adapt to emerging needs.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Consideration was given to a report Health and Wellbeing Revised Terms of Reference.

Since spring 2024, alongside developing the new Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Health and Wellbeing Board had undertaken a structured development programme to review its purpose, role, responsibilities, and effectiveness. This process generated a set of recommendations which had directly informed the revised Terms of Reference for the Board.

The review of the Health and Wellbeing Board generated a series of recommendations across four key thematic areas:

- The Board's purpose, role and responsibilities
- Strategy development, priority setting and agenda planning
- Membership and representation
- Ways of working, partnership culture and support arrangements

These recommendations had directly shaped the revised ToR for the Health and Wellbeing Board. The updated ToR incorporate the following key changes:

- Reaffirmation of the Board's role: While the Health and Wellbeing Board remains a formal statutory committee, it will operate primarily as a strategic partnership.
- Clarification of purpose: The Board is not an executive decision-making body, nor does it function as a scrutiny committee.
- Streamlined membership: The number of elected members has been reduced to support a more focused, partnership-led model. The new composition of elected members:
  - Leader of the Council
  - Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care
  - Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
  - Shadow Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care
  - Shadow Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
- Introduction of a Vice Chair: A new Vice Chair role, nominated from a partner organisation, has been created to promote shared leadership across the system.
- Expanded membership: The Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth has been added to the Board, strengthening the Board's focus on the wider determinants of health.
- Place-based focus: Greater emphasis is placed on developing a strong sense of place and a shared identity across the partnership.
- Clarity of remit: The Board's statutory functions and responsibilities are clearly articulated.
- Defined relationship with other governance structures: The revised Terms clarify the Board's distinct role in relation to other local groups, partnerships, and committees.
- Strategic alignment: The Board will actively support the alignment of local strategies, reduce duplication, and drive greater system integration.
- Shared ways of working: A common set of expectations has been agreed to underpin collaborative working and effective partnership behaviours.

RECOMMENDED to Council that the revised Terms of Reference for the Health and Wellbeing Board be approved.