

Date:

Thursday 18 September 2025 at 5.00 pm

Venue:

Council Chamber, Dunedin House, Columbia Drive, Thornaby, TS17 6BJ

Cllr Lisa Evans (Leader)

Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Clare Besford, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Paul Rowling and Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE

Agenda

1. **Evacuation Procedure** (Pages 7 - 10)
2. **Apologies for Absence**
3. **Minutes** (Pages 11 - 28)
4. **Declarations of Interest**

Cllr Paul Rowling - Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport

5. **MTFP Update (Quarter 1 2025/26)** (Pages 29 - 36)
6. **Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Annual Complaints Report 2024/25 and the new Complaints Policy 2024/25** (Pages 37 - 56)

Cllr Richard Eglington - Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing

7. **Powering our Future - Regeneration Mission - Town Hall and Debenhams**(Pages 57 - 62)
8. **Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy** (Pages 63 - 84)

Cllr Nigel Cooke - Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture

9. **Tees Valley Waste Project - Energy Reduction Facility (ERF) Update**(Pages 85 - 88)

Cllr Clare Besford - Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

10. **Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Plan** (Pages 89 - 120)
11. **School Term and Holiday Dates 2026/2027** (Pages 121 - 126)

Cllr Norma Stephenson - Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety

- 12. AI Strategic Approach** (Pages 127 - 138)

Cllr Pauline Beall - Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Care

- 13. Health and Wellbeing Revised Terms of Reference** (Pages 139 - 148)

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: Democratic Services Officer, Peter Bell on email peter.bell@stockton.gov.uk

Key – Declarable interests are :-

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

Members – Declaration of Interest Guidance



Table 1 - Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

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

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

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

Table 2 – Other Registerable Interest

You must register as an Other Registrable Interest:

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

Council Chamber, Dunedin House Evacuation Procedure & Housekeeping

Entry

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



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

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

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

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

The allocated assembly point for the Council Chamber is: D2

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



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

When the Alarm sounds:

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

5. await further instructions.

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

Toilets

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

Water Cooler

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

Microphones

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

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Agenda Item 3

Cabinet

A meeting of Cabinet was held on Thursday 17th July 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: Mike Greene, Peter Bell, Julie Butcher, Tracey Carter, Angela Connor, Stephen Donaghy (DoA&H), Clare Harper, Laura Kelsey, Reuben Kench, Majella McCarthy, Neil Mitchell, Ged Morton, Iain Robinson and Marc Stephenson.

Also in attendance: Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Jack Miller, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Ted Strike and Cllr Marcus Vickers.

Apologies: None.

CAB/22/25 Evacuation Procedure

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

CAB/23/25 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Nigel Cooke declared an Other Registerable Interest with regard to agenda item 10 - Activ8 Billingham Forum Gym Expansion as he was a member of Tees Active Management Board. Councillor Nigel Cooke withdrew from the meeting and left the room during consideration of the item.

Councillor Pauline Beall declared an Other Registerable Interest with regard to agenda item 12 - Powering our Future - Transformation Review Children in our Care as she was a member of the Fostering Panel. Councillor Pauline Beall withdrew from the meeting and left the room during consideration of the item.

Councillor Tony Riordan declared a Non Registerable Interest with regard to agenda item 12 - Powering our Future - Transformation Review Children in our Care as he had a family member who was a foster carer. Councillor Tony Riordan withdrew from the meeting and left the room during consideration of the item.

Councillor Pauline Beall declared an Other Registerable Interest with regard to agenda item 14 - Schools Capital Investment Strategy SEND St Johns and Mill Lane as she was a member of the Governing Body at Mill Lane Primary School. Councillor Pauline Beall withdrew from the meeting and left the room during consideration of the item.

CAB/24/25 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2025.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2025 be approved.

CAB/25/25 Minutes of Various Bodies

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

TSAB – 9 April 2025

TVCA Cabinet – 28 March 2025

RESOLVED that the minutes be received.

CAB/26/25 MTFP Update (Outturn 2024/25)

Consideration was given to a report that updated Cabinet on the draft financial performance and position as at 31 March 2025.

The overall financial position was similar to the position projected at the end of December 2024, as outlined in the Budget report in February 2025, with a variance of £69,000 from the previously reported position.

Actions taken to manage the overspend of £7m were agreed as part of the budget report, and the position was being carefully monitored.

Members were aware of the financial pressures going forward with the Powering our Futures Programme integral to identifying opportunities for resolving the gap. Significant progress had been made on this to date, and further reports would be presented throughout the year providing updates.

There had also been a notable movement in the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit, increasing to £6.7m as a result of growing numbers of children with Education, Health & Care Plans.

The Capital Programme had been updated to incorporate new schemes and reflect those schemes completed as at the financial year end.

RESOLVED that the outturn position for the year ended 31 March 2025 and the updated Capital Programme be noted.

CAB/27/25 Xentrall Annual Report 2024/25

Consideration was given to a report that reviewed the progress and performance of Xentrall Shared Services.

Xentrall Shared Services was a public sector partnership between Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) and Darlington Borough Council (DBC). Established in May 2008, Xentrall was in its seventeenth year working jointly with both Councils supporting them in the delivery of their services.

The services delivered by the partnership were:

- a. Xentrall Design & Print (Printing Services, Design Services, Displays & Exhibitions)
- b. Xentrall Finance (Creditors, Debtors, Banking, Income, System Support & Development)
- c. Xentrall HR (Payroll, Pensions, Recruitment, System Support & Development)
- d. Xentrall ICT (Service Desk, End User Device Management, Platform, Applications, Architecture Strategy, Information Security)

The initial aim of Xentrall was to improve service performance and reduce the cost of the functions it delivers by £7.4m over the original ten-year period of the partnership. Xentrall surpassed this financial expectation by delivering £14m savings across the same period as reported to Members over previous years.

The quality and performance of services had also improved over the lifetime of the partnership through a range of past and continuing service improvements and developments.

This was a significant achievement for a public / public partnership and it compared very well to other private sector partnerships many of which had failed over the same period or been brought back in-house and for a variety of reasons.

In recognition of the on-going success of the partnership, in 2015 Members agreed to amend the original ten-year period into an on-going rolling agreement which continues to this day.

The partnership was governed by the Xentrall Executive Board, namely the Director of Finance, Transformation & Performance (SBC) and Executive Director – Resources and Governance (DBC), and was managed by the Assistant Director (Xentrall Shared Services).

Xentrall continued to perform very well and deliver developmental projects alongside its day-to-day services to both Councils and external customers.

Looking forward, activities would include:

- a. Xentrall Design & Print will continue to support both Councils, working closely with their respective Communications Teams and other services to ensure they all receive the solutions they need. The service is looking to reduce the number of prints produced on the printer/copier fleet at both Councils by using alternative bulk printing methods.
- b. Xentrall Finance will continue to work with both Councils have a number of projects planned or underway which include; implementing the migration of the main finance system and income management systems to a cloud-hosted solutions
- c. Xentrall HR will continue to work with both Councils and external academy customers in the exploitation of the HR/Payroll system and the MyHR employee interface and app. Legislative changes will continue to be applied to the system in a timely manner, as will the application of any pay awards as and when agreed.
- d. Xentrall ICT will continue to support both Councils and external customers with information and technology solutions. The service is planning to implement further cyber security measures and planning further exploitation of the ICT service desk system to improve services to customers.

In addition to the above programme and as with previous years, the continual service improvement mentality within Xentrall would be applied to leverage any further service improvements and/or savings for both Councils where possible. Outside of this programme, Xentrall would continue to assess new business opportunities should these arise as this approach aligns with the Xentrall business model of tactically growing the business, which in turn helps to support both Council's Medium Term Financial Plans.

CAB/28/25 Treasury Management Practices Update

Consideration was given to a report that provided an update to the delegations for treasury management activities included within the Treasury Management Practices.

In accordance with CIPFA's Code of Practice for Treasury Management in the Public Services the Council has regard to the key recommendations when determining the current Treasury Management Strategy.

Accordingly, the Council creates and maintains, as the cornerstones for effective treasury management:-

- A treasury management policy statement, stating the policies, objectives and approach to risk management of its treasury management activities.
- Suitable Treasury Management Practices (TMPs), setting out the manner in which the Council will seek to achieve those policies and objectives, and prescribing how it will manage and control those activities.

The Council (i.e. full Council) will receive reports on its treasury management policies, practices and activities including, as a minimum, an annual strategy and plan in advance of the year.

The Council delegates responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of its treasury management policies and practices to the Audit and Governance Committee and for the execution and administration of treasury management decisions to the nominated Section 151 Officer (the officer with Responsibilities under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972) will act in accordance with the organisation's policy statement and TMPs and CIPFA's Standard of Professional Practice on Treasury Management.

The Council's Treasury Management Strategy was last approved by Council in February 2025 as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan Update and Strategy Report.

The Treasury Management Practices were last approved by Council as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan Update and Strategy Report in February 2023 and cover the following topics

TMP 1 - Risk management

TMP 2 - Performance measurement

TMP 3 - Decision-making and analysis

TMP 4 - Approved instruments, methods and techniques

TMP 5 - Authority, clarity and segregation of responsibilities and dealing arrangements

TMP 6 - Reporting requirements and management information arrangements

TMP 7 - Budgeting, accounting and audit arrangements

TMP 8 - Cash and cash flow management

TMP 9 - Anti Money laundering

TMP 10 - Staff training and qualifications

TMP 11 - Use of external service providers

TMP 12 - Corporate governance

TMP 5; Authority, clarity and segregation of responsibilities and dealing arrangements, delegates responsibility for day to day treasury management activities to nominated officers within the finance service. Following the retirement of the Council's existing Section 151 Officer (the officer with responsibilities under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972), the delegations had been updated. The updated TMP5 was attached to the report at Appendix A.

RECOMMENDED to Council that the updated TMP5 included at Appendix A of the report, including the updated officer delegations relating to treasury management activities be approved.

CAB/29/25 Powering our Future - Regeneration Mission Update

Consideration was given to a report that provided an update on activity across the Powering Our Futures Regeneration mission with updates on the delivery of the Central Stockton and North Thornaby Blueprint, namely progression of key work strands linked to Care Health Innovation Zone and steps to bring about increased residential development across key sites and initial work to bring about the long term redevelopment of Tees Marshalling Yards under the new term for the area, Tees Central. The report included updates across the existing committed wide ranging regeneration programme and sought decisions to enable the demolition of Golden Eagle in Thornaby, future opportunities for use of existing assets in Stockton town centre and progress on agreements to bring about redevelopment of Billingham town centre.

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 as illustrated within the report.

The report provided an update on interventions across the blueprint area and set out next steps to progress specific sites and opportunities in relation to the redevelopment of the Tees Marshalling Yards, the delivery of Tees Valley Care and Health Innovation Zone and the delivery of town centre living and commercial opportunities for existing council land and assets.

Given the scale and significance of this regeneration opportunity, and to raise its profile at both a regional and national level, it was proposed that all future work would be delivered under the name 'Tees Central', which reflected both its geographic location and the scale of inclusive growth opportunity in the heart of the Tees Valley.

The report gave detail on the following areas of activity:-

- Tees Marshalling Yards
- Tees Valley Care and Health Innovation Zone (TVCHIZ)
- Stockton Waterfront
- Town Centre Living
- Stockton Town Centre Commercial opportunities
- The Shambles
- Stockton Town Hall
- Debenhams
- Splash
- Billingham – Levelling Up Fund
- Thornaby Pavillion Pool, Gym and Golden Eagle
- Cycleways
- NETA
- North Thornaby
- Yarm, Eaglescliffe and Preston Park – Levelling Up Fund
- Norton High Street

Following discussion Cabinet agreed to remove recommendation 4 that was contained within the report.

RESOLVED that:-

1. Recommendation 4 as set out in the report be deferred.
2. The initiation of the Tees Central project be approved as part of the Powering our Future Placemaking mission and the use of previously approved funds of £450,000 allocated to Municipal Quarter to support works to develop proposals within Tees Central project and the delivery of the Central Stockton and North Thornaby Blueprint be approved and the reciprocal reallocation of previously approved £450,000 by Tees Valley Combined Authority for the same purpose be noted.
3. The use of £550,000 of previously approved funding to support delivery of Stockton and North Thornaby Blueprint to support development of proposals within Tees Central be approved.
4. Authority be delegated to the Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing to approve the allocation of the budget of £1.45m set out in recommendation 1&2 to deliver the Central Stockton and North Thornaby Blueprint and Tees Central.

5. The use of up to £1.34m Indigenous Growth Fund (IGF) be approved for the demolition of the Golden Eagle and authority to negotiate, agree the terms of and enter, all necessary contracts to enable the demolition of the Golden Eagle be delegated to Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth in consultation with Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing.

6. The detail of Yarm public realm scheme and programme as set out in paragraphs 74-80 of the report be noted.

7. The change in commercial approach to the acquisition and demolition of Queensway South in Billingham town centre as set out in para 51-52 of the report be noted.

CAB/30/25 Activ8 Billingham Forum Gym Expansion

Consideration was given to a report that sought approval for the redevelopment and expansion of the Activ8 gym at Billingham Forum. The proposal included increasing gym capacity, upgrading facilities, and improving service quality to meet growing demand. The expansion was critical to sustaining Activ8's financial performance and supporting public health objectives.

The Council had leisure facilities across the Borough; Billingham Forum, Billingham Forum Theatre, Thornaby Pavilion, Thornaby Pool, Splash and Ingleby Barwick Leisure Facility, Tees Barrage International White Water Course Centre. These were managed and operated on behalf of the Council by the Leisure Trust; Tees Active Limited. Activ8 Health and Fitness is the membership name operated by Tees Active Limited.

These assets offer a varied range of activities and experiences to local residents and visitors including swimming, ice skating and gym provision.

The UK fitness sector had shown strong post-COVID recovery, with Activ8 outperforming national trends. Billingham Forum was a very well used and highly valued asset by local residents, however the gym was constrained by gym capacity. Billingham Forum gym was operating at full capacity. The current Members Per Station (MPS) ratio would limit further and impact upon service quality.

The gyms across all of the Council's leisure facilities were well used and highly regarded by residents and visitors. The Council had a proven track record of investing in leisure assets to maintain and improve high quality assets for the local community. The Council was investing in Stockton Splash and Thornaby Pavillion. Options had been considered to address the capacity and improve the gym provision at Billingham Forum.

Three options were detailed within the report.

The preferred option was a full expansion of the gym into underutilised areas (Studio 3 and dry-side changing rooms) to increase gym floor space and equipment provision. The new layout included:

- Additional exercise stations
- Two free weight/plate-loaded zones
- Upgraded cardio and resistance equipment

- Dedicated small group training and personal training areas

The estimated total project cost was £900,000, comprised of £650,000 relating to the internal building works and £250,000 relating to new equipment. The Council would fund the works to the internal fit out at an estimated project cost of £650,000 and TAL would fund the new equipment.

It was proposed that the Council's investment would be funded by up to £650,000 of prudential borrowing, drawn down from the £20m Council Wide Investment Fund approved by Council as part of the Medium Term and Financial Plan Update and Strategy Report in February 2025, with allocations from that fund delegated to Cabinet.

The prudential borrowing repayments (£48,000 p.a.) would be covered by Tees Active Limited through the additional income generated.

Billingham Forum had a proven history of successful expansions, with income growing by 41% and 35% in 2017 and 2020 after previous expansions. Since opening Ingleby Barwick leisure Facility the gym had also been hugely popular here too.

This proposed expansion would increase the number of exercise stations as well as introducing new training zones aligned with current fitness trends.

The proposal was in line with the Stockton on Tees Plan, in particular aligning with the Healthy and Resilient Communities priority. It also supports Tees Active's long-term growth strategy to meet community needs, and mitigates financial risk from rising operational costs and competition from other privately operated facilities.

The redevelopment would create additional capacity with minimal disruption, leading to a very brief gym closure period, planned for when the facility is traditionally at its quietest period of the year.

The project was expected to grow membership by around 20% over a 5 year period, with additional income generated used to fund the prudential borrowing. The investment would greatly enhance a prominent and well loved asset, contributing to the wider regeneration of Billingham town centre.

The full expansion option would offer the an improved and larger gym facility within Billingham Forum, allowing more local residents to enjoy access to the gym, as well as improved experience for existing gym members.

The proposed timeline for the Billingham Forum gym expansion was strategically designed to ensure completion by mid-December, enabling a pre-Christmas reopening and promotional launch. This timing was critical to capitalise on the annual January surge in gym memberships, which was consistently the busiest period for new member sign-ups across the fitness industry.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The proposed redevelopment of the Billingham Forum gym be approved.

2. The use of prudential borrowing of up to £650,000, from the £20m Council Wide Investment Fund approved at Council in February 2025 be approved.

3. Authority be delegated to the Director of Community Services, Environment and Culture to make the specific contract award decision and any subsequent contract variations as necessary to support effective delivery of the project.

CAB/31/25 Strategy for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Outdoor Play Provision 2025

Following the Scrutiny Review of Outdoor Play Provision, in April of 2024, the Crime and Disorder Select Committee (now renamed) recommended that officers should prepare a strategy (later approved by Cabinet) which included the following elements:

- The Council's aims in relation to the provision of outdoor play spaces.
- The locations and assessments of existing and outdoor play provision, as well as any planned developments.
- The key challenges associated with providing these spaces.
- How the Council will seek to address these key challenges (including guiding principles).
- Timelines for action and who will be accountable.

Following extensive consultation with officers and evidence gathering the initial sections of the Strategy for Council Outdoor Play Provision 2025 had been prepared and was attached to the report.

The Borough had 56 play areas which were available for the public to use free of charge at all reasonable times:

- 40 were owned and managed by Stockton Borough Council,
- 9 were owned by town / parish councils but managed by the Borough Council.
- 7 were owned and managed by housing developers / management companies.

There were plans for a further 12 play areas to be delivered over the next few years (3 to be provided by the Council and 9 to be provided by housing developers) although this was subject to change.

The Strategy aimed to:

- Maintain a range of good quality play areas and informal sport facilities
- Achieve a fair and equitable distribution of outdoor play provision across the Borough
- Deliver welcoming, accessible and inclusive play spaces, while acknowledging that not all sites can cater for all needs and abilities
- Ensure the overall scale of provision is at a level which is sustainable in terms of Council resource

By allocating an additional £150,000 pa to the parks, open spaces, cemeteries and allotments budget, the council will be able to retain approximately 30-35 play areas in addition to the new play provision planned for the Stockton Waterfront urban park. Approximately 7-12 sites would be subject to phased de-commissioning.

Recommendations for specific sites would be included in the final version of the strategy following detailed analysis of play provision using data referenced in Chapter 6 (page 19) of the first stage strategy document.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The first stage strategy document including the principles set out in Chapter 5 of the strategy document be approved.
2. The requirement of additional revenue funding of £150,000 per annum from 2026/27 onwards be noted. This would enable the Council to retain approximately 30-35 play areas in good condition, in addition to the new play area at Stockton Waterfront urban park. Approximately 7 to 12 play areas would be subject to removal of play equipment at end of life and repurposing of sites for recreational open space. Funding would be considered as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan Update & Strategy report to Council in February 2026.
3. Cabinet agree to consider, at a later stage, a second report and final version of the strategy. This will include an assessment of play provision (adopting the principles and overall approach outlined in this first stage strategy) and make recommendations for specific sites.

CAB/32/25 Powering our Future - Transformation Review: Children in our Care - Fostering Service

Consideration was given to a report that presented a proposal for modernising the fostering service in Stockton-on-Tees following a comprehensive review, options appraisal and development of a business case. The objective was to address the declining number of foster carers and the increasing number of children in external private provider care, to support better outcomes for children in care, and help give them the best start in life. The proposal aimed to build sufficiency within the mainstream fostering service by encouraging new foster carers, retaining existing ones, and meeting the diverse needs of children in care.

Proposals in the report were an important part of the approach to reduce inequality by prioritising Early Help and Prevention, supporting more children to live within safe and inclusive communities.

The Council's Mission Statement and wider Powering Our Future Programme, prioritised Early Help and prevention, supporting more children to live in safe and inclusive communities that provide them with opportunities to thrive. This means working differently with communities, to harness the strengths that exist to build resilience and independence.

In April 2024, Cabinet agreed to a review of Children in our Care as part of phase 1 of the Transformation Programme. This provided clarity on the scope and objectives for the review, in alignment with the Council's Mission Statement.

The review had led to a comprehensive understanding of challenges making use of research, data and intelligence. Findings and drivers for change along with options and proposals were summarised as follows:-

- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council faces challenges with a high number of children in care (564 as at 10.04.25) and a reducing number of in-house fostering households (81 as at 10.04.25), This has led to a reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) and external residential care, which are costly and often place children outside the borough.

- The costs associated with using external providers are extremely high compared to mainstream fostering. Additionally, the lack of local placements means social workers must travel long distances to visit children, increasing workloads and reducing the frequency of contact. External providers often serve short notice on placements, causing instability and escalating children's needs, which leads to a cycle of increasingly complex needs and higher costs.

- Due to the shortage of foster placements, emergency placements sometimes result in unregulated care arrangements, which are unlawful and require additional risk management. This practice has brought scrutiny from Ofsted, the Department for Education, and the Children's Commissioner, highlighting the urgent need for more regulated foster care options.

- As of 10th April 2025, 69% of the 564 children in care were in foster care placements, with 104 children placed with SBC Foster Carers, 102 with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) and 183 with Connected Carers. The remaining 173 children were in residential care, regulated supported accommodation or other placements.

- The number of mainstream foster carers has steadily decreased since 2019, with 70 leaving the service and only 40 approved to replace them. The main reasons for resignations include retirement, ill health, and foster carers entering paid employment.

- The current profile of in-house foster carers is insufficient, with difficulties in recruiting individuals who can develop the requisite skills to care for children with complex needs. Our payments to foster carers are lower than those offered by neighbouring Councils and IFAs, leading some carers to seek paid employment, reducing their availability. The proposal suggests introducing a new fee structure to encourage foster carers to improve their skills and care for children with more complex needs, making our offer more competitive.

- Recent national, regional and local research by Newton Europe validates the need for additional fostering placements, especially for children with complex needs. The average weekly cost for residential care has increased significantly between 2020 and 2024 from £4,000 per week to £6,000 per week, while external fostering costs increased by 20%. The proportion of children in residential care has risen, and there is a notable increase in children entering care aged 10 and older. Most children currently in residential care were previously supported in fostering, indicating a need for more suitable foster carers.

- The findings of the review and appraisal of options highlight the urgent need for modernising the fostering service to address the declining number of foster carers, high costs, placement instability, and the need for enhanced support and training.

Several options were appraised as detailed below:

Option 1: Do Nothing

This option involves continuing without investment therefore risks fewer carers, higher costs, unstable placements, and poorer outcomes for children

Option 2: Modernise the Current Fee Structure and Support Package (Recommended Option)

This option proposes introducing a new, tiered fee structure for foster carers, particularly those caring for children with complex needs. It includes an enhanced support package with additional training (e.g., DDP), a new Mockingbird constellation, therapeutic services via CAMHS, and an extra social worker to support increased demand. It also introduces an annual appreciation fee. This option is expected to improve recruitment and retention, reduce reliance on external providers, and has the potential to generate savings. The annual cost of the proposal will depend upon the actual number of new foster carers recruited and the needs of the children. Financial modelling has been undertaken and the estimated additional cost based on current numbers is £770,000 per annum.

Option 3: Align with a Neighbouring Local Authority's Fee Structure

Similar to Option 2, this option involves modernising the fee structure and support offer but aligns specifically with the higher rates offered by an outstanding neighbouring authority. It includes the same support enhancements as Option 2 but requires a larger investment (£1.6 million per annum). While it offers a competitive package, the higher cost makes it less financially favourable than Option 2.

Option 4: Partnership with an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA)

This option explored forming a strategic partnership with an IFA to leverage their expertise in recruitment, training, and support. While it could bring in specialist knowledge and resources, it presents significant risks, including potential legal challenges, loss of control over placement quality, and complications with existing foster carers and staff. It also raises concerns about long-term sustainability and alignment with the council's values and goals.

The options were evaluated based on their potential to address the key issues, financial implications, and overall impact on the fostering service and outcomes for children. Option 2: To modernise the current fee structure and support package is recommended as the proposed option due to its balanced approach to investment, support, and expected savings for the following reasons:

- An improved package of fees for all carers that moves us closer to the fees paid by NE Local Authorities. This will encourage our current cohort of foster carers to remain with the council and attract new foster carers to the service.
- More children will be supported in family-based care that meets their needs.
- Offers a competitive fee for either existing or new carers to foster children with complex needs providing two higher fee rates than is currently available. To offset the introduction of these new fees, the council intends to undertake intensive recruitment campaigns to target new foster carers through the profiling of individual children to ensure long term matches are achieved based on their needs.
- The introduction of an appreciation fee, paid on an annual basis, will reinforce the council's commitment to its current and future cohorts of foster carers. Knowing they are valued and respected for their commitment to children in our care will help to retain existing and future foster carers.
- Provides a comprehensive package of support. Whilst our current cohort of foster carers rate the support and training offered by the council highly (foster carer consultation feedback), the complexity of needs of some children in care are challenging and can risk placements breaking down without having recourse to a proficient level of support. The introduction of an additional Mockingbird constellation, therapeutic responses from CAMHS and the opportunity to access DDP training with residential care staff will help build resilience of foster carers to enable them to conduct their fostering role.

- An additional social worker post will provide capacity within the team to address the expected increase in the number of referrals, applications, and approvals for new foster carers.
- Whilst the introduction of these new measures to recruit and retain foster carers will require investment, this will be offset through savings made from the re-unification of children from external residential and from IFA placements back into mainstream foster care. The financial savings associated with this reduction on expensive external placements is estimated to be £2.5 million per annum by year 4. It will also achieve better outcomes for those children who are currently in residential care despite their permanence plans identifying that the most appropriate placement to meet their needs is in a fostering placement. Further savings should also be achievable through cost avoidance of future placements, where children are supported in in-house fostering rather than external placements, modelling has indicated this could be a further £990,000 by year 4.

RESOLVED with regard to Annexe 1 of the report

To exclude the press and public from the meeting pursuant to section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 during the consideration of Annexe 1 to the report due to the likelihood that if members of the public were present during that item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information and

The information is exempt information because it is information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) under Paragraph 3 of Part One of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

As no member wished to discuss Annexe 1 the public were not excluded from the meeting.

RESOLVED that:-

1. A New Fee Structure be introduced for Foster Carers: The proposed new fee structure for foster carers includes four levels ranging from £100 per week to £450 per week for carers providing care for children with the most complex needs. This structure aims to make our offer more competitive, attract new foster carers, and retain existing ones by recognising and rewarding the varying levels of care required. The maximum current fee a foster carer can receive is £125 per week. The new fee structure will be implemented from September 2025.

In addition, the introduction of an annual appreciation fee to recognise and reward foster carers for their commitment and efforts. This is subject to a successful annual review and the completion of a minimum of three training courses. The fee is set at £500 per household, aiming to show appreciation and encourage continuous professional development among foster carers. The new annual appreciation fee will be implemented from September 2025.

2. An Enhanced Package of Training and Support be introduced: Provide a wider training offer, including Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) training, establish an additional Mockingbird constellation to support foster carers, commission therapeutic services from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and increase capacity within the fostering team by appointing an additional social

worker. The enhanced package of support will commence from October 2025, in a staged process.

3. Targeted Recruitment Campaigns take place: Conduct intensive marketing campaigns to recruit specialist foster carers for children with complex needs and profile individual children to ensure long-term matches based on their needs. Campaigns will commence in September 2025.

4. The Reunification of Children takes place: Reunify children from external residential and Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements back into mainstream foster care. The process of matching children with long term foster carers will begin once specialist foster carers have been identified to meet their needs.

CAB/33/25 Schools Capital Investment Strategy - Northfield and Oxbridge

Consideration was given to a report that sought approval for the allocation of capital funding to support two priority projects under the Council's School Investment Strategy: the refurbishment of pupil toilet facilities at Northfield School and funding for final stages of the development at Oxbridge Primary School.

In October 2022, Cabinet approved the revised proposals relating to the school investment strategy of unallocated funds to support investment in Oxbridge Lane Primary School and Bishopton Centre Pupil Referral Unit. Whilst the works on Bishopton Centre completed in April 2024, with the introduction of 20 additional places for children who require alternative provision, the outlined works at Oxbridge Primary School require further investment prior to completion. Further agreed investment at that time, for SEND Provision at Abbey Hill at North Shore and Ash Trees at Billingham South are now complete, operational and running at capacity.

In Spring 2025, following allocation of funding by the Department for Education and further funding being obtained, the Council had £9.31m of unallocated capital funding from a range of sources (a summary is provided below). Whilst a separate report was being prepared in respect of proposed capital investment relating to required SEND provision, a further request was being made to invest in completion of the Oxbridge Lane Primary School works and for consideration of investment in Northfield School.

- £1.56m Unallocated Basic Need Grant
- £3.87m Unallocated High Need Capital Funding
- £3.88m of Developer Contributions towards education

A significant amount of this was proposed to be invested into SEND provision in Stockton and a separate report would be presented to Cabinet to this effect. However, there was sufficient funds available within the £9.31m available to deliver the £1.66m worth of proposals in this report.

There were no cost saving or cost avoidance attached to this investment.

RESOLVED that:-

1. An additional £500,000 of capital funding be agreed to complete the building works at Oxbridge Primary School.

2. £1.16m of capital funding be invested to install additional toilet block facilities at Northfield School & Sports College.

3. Authority be delegated to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, to take all necessary steps to deliver the projects within the approved budgets.

4. The transfer of budget caused by cost variations within the approved programme be delegated to the Section 151 Officer and the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport and the Cabinet Member for Children's and Young People.

CAB/34/25 Schools Capital Investment Strategy - SEND St. John's and Mill Lane

Consideration was given to a report that sought approval for capital investment in the development and enhancement of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision across the Borough. This funding would support two planned projects aimed at increasing local capacity and ensuring the Council meets its statutory obligations to children and young people with SEND.

The two planned projects were at St John the Baptist Primary School and Mill Lane Primary School. The report contained the full details of the planned projects.

RESOLVED that:-

1. £5.35m of capital funding be invested at St John the Baptist Primary School, to undertake necessary building work and essential works to the school to maintain the 24 SEND Unit places and allow for the displaced early years provision to be reunified in the main school building.

2. £1.7m of capital funding be invested at Mill Lane Primary School, to create a SEND Unit for children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs.

3. Authority be delegated to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, to take all necessary steps to deliver the projects within the approved budgets.

4. The transfer of budget caused by cost variations within the approved programme be delegated to the Section 151 Officer and the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport and the Cabinet Member for Children's and Young People.

5. Authority be delegated to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, to allocate the contingency of £600,000 if required within the approved programme.

CAB/35/25 Air Quality Strategy 2025-2030

Consideration was given to a report on Air Quality Strategy 2025-2030.

Poor air quality was one of the largest risks to public health and DEFRA required all Local Authorities to produce an Air Quality Strategy. The purpose of this was to

ensure air quality was at the forefront of Council decision making whilst also protecting the health and well-being of those who live and visit our borough.

Within Stockton-on-Tees, Environmental Health were responsible for monitoring the levels of air quality using two automatic sites and 15 diffusion tubes strategically placed throughout the Borough in areas of high volumes of traffic or in locations where concern about the air quality had been raised. The Air Quality levels within Stockton-on-Tees were better than the national standard which meant the Council did not need more stringent measures seen in other areas of the country such as Air Quality Management Areas. In fact, over the past five years, since 2019, there had been continuous improvement in air quality levels each of the monitoring locations.

Even though the Council was seeing improvements locally, it was known there was more to do to protect local communities. The purpose of the report was for Cabinet to approval of the draft Air Quality Strategy for Stockton-on-Tees which would be in place from 2025 until 2030. The strategy contained 42 measures which aimed to improve air quality levels further, whilst encouraging behavioural changes from Council operations, residents, businesses and visitors to the Borough.

RESOLVED that the draft Air Quality Strategy for Stockton-on-Tees 2025-2030 be approved.

CAB/36/25 Hotel Company Report

Consideration was given to a report that sought approval to update the governance arrangements for the Council's wholly owned hotel company, Stockton Hotels Company Ltd, and its parent company, Stockton Borough Holding Company Ltd. The proposed changes were intended to update the Council's role as shareholder, further strengthen board composition through the introduction of independent expertise and establish a single, Shareholders' Agreement to codify key controls and expectations.

The measures would reinforce oversight and reflect good practice in the governance of local authority trading companies.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The development of a new Shareholders' Agreement covering both Stockton Borough Holding Company Ltd (HoldCo) and Stockton Hotels Company Ltd (HotelCo) be approved.
2. The Council's shareholder representative shall continue to be the officer exercising the statutory Section 151 responsibilities, following the retirement of the previous postholder.
3. The proposed enhancement of the HotelCo board through the appointment of independent non-executive directors with relevant commercial or hospitality experience be approved.
4. Tracey Carter, Director of Regeneration & Inclusive Growth be appointed as a council appointed director of each company.

5. Authority be delegated to the Director of Corporate Services, the Section 151 Officer and the Chief Executive to finalise the Shareholders' Agreement in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

CAB/37/25 Car Parking Charges

Consideration was given to a report on car parking charges in the Yarm and Stockton.

In October 2024, Cabinet made the decision to remove the first free hour of car parking across Council owned car parks in Stockton and Yarm. The decision to remove the free hour was taken with the aim of balancing the need to cover the costs of maintaining and managing car parking, with the desire to ensure our town centres remain attractive to shoppers.

At that October meeting a commitment was also made to reviewing the new arrangements to consider the impact on residents, visitors, and council finances.

At the May 2025 Full Council meeting, a motion was passed which recommended that Cabinet consider reversing this decision in respect of Yarm. As the policy decision applies to both Stockton and Yarm, and as there was an earlier Cabinet commitment to review the impact across both towns, the report set out the suggested scope for the review of charges, including consideration of impacts to businesses and residents.

The report also outlined the actions taken to mitigate any negative impact and the initial findings in relation to car park occupancy and footfall, as context for the review.

RESOLVED that the initial data in relation to parking in Yarm and Stockton be noted and the scope of the review of car park charges set out in the report be approved.

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AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

18 SEPTEMBER 2025

REPORT OF CORPORATE MANAGEMENT TEAM

CABINET DECISION

Resources and Transport – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Paul Rowling

FINANCIAL UPDATE AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (2025/26 QUARTER 1)

SUMMARY

This report summarises 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 has identified savings of £5.8m by 2026/27 to date. The updated savings target is now £1.35m in 2025/26 and £2.256m in 2026/27. The transformation programme, alongside the wider Powering our Futures Programme, will 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) highlights a projected overspend of £1.684m against the budget. Growing demand for Council services and the increased cost of delivery is putting pressure on several budget headings. Work is underway to look at ways to mitigate this projected overspend and the position will continue to be closely monitored and managed throughout the remainder of the financial year.

The financial challenges facing Stockton reflect a wider national picture, with councils across the country experiencing significant and well-documented pressures. Stockton has 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 is not sustainable. Work is already under way on the 2026/27 budget and the updated MTFP, ensuring that planning is proactive and focused on maintaining financial resilience. Cabinet will continue to receive regular updates on progress and the measures being developed.

The report also presents an update on the Capital Programme.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS/DECISIONS

To update Members on the Council's financial performance and the Medium Term Financial Plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

DETAIL**FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2025****GENERAL FUND**

1. The following table details the projected budget outturn position for each Directorate in 2025/26, based on information to 30th June 2025. The position includes the emerging impact of inflationary pressures and details of the key variances are described in subsequent paragraphs of the report.

Directorate	Annual Budget	Projected Outturn	Projected Variance Q1 Over/(Under)
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Adults, Health & Wellbeing	106,163	105,720	(443)
Children's Services	62,782	63,427	645
Community Services, Environment & Culture	56,739	57,597	858
Finance, Transformation & Performance	15,337	15,282	(55)
Regeneration & Inclusive Growth	2,233	2,401	168
Corporate Services	11,676	11,497	(179)
Corporate Items	8,802	8,892	90
Total	263,732	264,816	1,084
Pay Offer		0	600
Revised Total	263,732	264,816	1,684

2. The projected position indicates a financial pressure for the current financial year, largely because of growth in demand for council services and additional pressures due to higher pay award than budgeted. All Directorates are considering opportunities to reduce / defer spend to support the position and the position will be kept under close review for the remainder of the year, with actions underway to try to improve the position, however the challenge to do so whilst maintaining current service provision is more and more difficult in the current financial environment.

Reasons for Variances over £100,000**Adults, Health and Wellbeing**

3. There is a projected underspend against budgets for Community Based Services for people with physical disabilities, including older people of (£568,000). This is mainly due to demand for the service being lower than estimated following the implementation of the new Care at Home contracts in 2024/25.
4. Expenditure on residential placements for older people is expected to be (£200,000) less than budget due to more income from client contributions than anticipated.
5. Demand for residential placements for people with Learning Disabilities has increased significantly, with the number of clients exceeding the budgeted numbers generating a projected overspend of £378,000.

Children's Services

6. Children's Services have experienced unprecedented budget pressures in recent years due to huge increases in the cost of residential placements as well as escalating needs, requiring greater levels of care. Members will recall the commentary on the pressures in previous reports and the investment in Children's Services across recent years.
7. A proposal to modernise the Fostering Service as part of the Transformation Review of Children in Our Care was approved by Cabinet in July. The objective is to address the declining number of foster carers and the increasing number of children in external private provider care, to support better outcomes for children in our care, and help give them the best start in life. The proposal aims to build sufficiency within the mainstream fostering service by encouraging new foster carers, retaining existing ones, and meeting the diverse needs of children in care. The business case anticipates less reliance on costly external residential placements, therefore relieving pressure on the budget across the medium term.
8. A significant number of children have come into care since budget setting and are being supported in a connected foster care arrangement. This is generating a projected overspend of £610,000 to the year end.
9. Services provided for young people aged 16/17 in care and care leavers, such as support and accommodation costs and living allowances, are currently expected to exceed the budget by £200,000.
10. The academy model is proving to be successful in filling social worker posts and agency spend is down significantly this year compared to previous years. However, there are still several vacancies across the service which is generating a projected underspend. This is offset by several smaller pressures on expenditure budgets resulting in a projected underspend of (£224,000).

Community Services, Environment and Culture

11. The number of children requiring Home to School transport has continued to grow this financial year. As a result, the service has a predicted overspend of £638,000.
12. Members will be aware of the high inflation increases in recent years, particularly in relation to food costs. This has meant that the cost of providing our catering services has increased significantly. As a result of this there are budgetary pressures across the catering service including schools and cafes predicted at £336,000.
13. Income from Green Waste disposal is projected to exceed the current budget leading to additional projected income of (£169,000).
14. Members will be aware that in previous years we have earmarked resources to support TAL to manage inflationary pressures in respect of energy costs and £500,000 is currently included in the budget. In previous MTFP updates, we have reported that due to the overall financial performance of TAL, this resource has not historically been required. Due to energy prices continuing to fall and usage being carefully managed it is currently anticipated that these full resources will not be required in 2025/26, saving (£500,000).
15. The highways maintenance budget has a complex mix of cost and income drivers, making it a volatile budget. We are currently experiencing increases in prices for materials and contractors, which is anticipated to lead to a financial pressure this year. These costs will be partly offset by staffing savings across the service, with the anticipated pressure being £102,000 by the end of the year.

16. The major capital investment of Preston Park Museum has resulted in a disruption to operational plans, leading to closure of the museum for a prolonged period this financial year. The costs of operating the museum continue to grow, also causing pressure against the budget. As a result there is an estimated overspend against budget of £216,000.

17. In the Libraries service, costs for running the service exceed the budget available. £182,000.

Finance, Transformation and Performance

18. There are anticipated to be significant savings across the Directorate due to staffing vacancies, leading to a projected underspend of (£347,000).

19. There are financial pressures emerging due to an increase in payments of benefits where subsidy is not paid at the normal 100% rate. This is in relation to supported accommodation and increased provision of temporary accommodation linked to increasing pressures of homelessness. This is projected to create an expenditure pressure of £250,000 within the housing benefits budgets.

20. Expenditure on the corporate mail and paper is anticipated to be higher than budget, as well as new equipment being required, which is generating a predicted overspend of £117,000.

Regeneration and Inclusive Growth

21. There are anticipated to be savings due to staffing vacancies within the planning service, leading to a projected underspend of (£245,000).

22. We are experiencing rising financial pressures in relation to the running and maintaining of the Council's assets portfolio thus leading to a projected overspend of £155,000. Work is ongoing through the Council's Strategic Asset Management Plan to develop and find different uses for assets to minimise these costs.

23. Wellington Square is anticipated to have a shortfall on shopping centre income due to vacant units of £200,000. The Council will continue to work with prospective tenants on future lettings to mitigate against this.

Corporate Services Directorate

24. There are anticipated to be significant savings across the Directorate due to staffing vacancies, leading to a projected underspend of (£236,000).

Corporate Areas

25. There are no significant variances to report at Q1.

Pay Offer 2025/26

26. The pay award for 2025/26 for employees on National Joint Council (inc. Chief Officers) terms and conditions has been agreed with the trade unions. The terms of the pay award are that all employees will receive an increase of 3.2%. This was paid to employees as part of their August salary. The MTFP for 2025/26 included a provision at 3%, therefore the additional amount above this has resulted in a budget pressure of £600,000.

Powering Our Futures

27. Members will be aware from the various briefings and reports that the Powering our Futures programme is now progressing at pace and updates on progress of the programme will continue to be reported to Cabinet.

28. The Powering Our Futures programme, and in particular the transformation mission has identified savings of £5.8m by 2026/27 to date. The updated savings target is now £1.35m in 2025/26 and £2.256m in 2026/27. The transformation programme, alongside the wider Powering our Futures Programme, will continue to look to address the budget gap, alongside ensuring improvements to services to local residents.

General Fund Balances & Reserves

29. The Council aims to retain General Fund Balances at a prudent level, currently at £8,000,000.

30. In addition to the £8m General Fund balances the Council holds several earmarked reserves. This funding is held for a variety of purposes including for known and committed risks, such as the insurance fund and revenue funding for the capital programme. Due to overspends in previous years, reserves have reduced significantly.

31. If in-year savings do not materialise to fund the projected overspend, funds would need to be redirected from these reserves. The use of reserves to fund overspends is not sustainable and it is a key area that we must work to avoid as part of the transformation programme.

CAPITAL

32. As with revenue expenditure and income, the public sector and local authorities are now experiencing significant pressures relating to capital schemes and construction contracts. The position will be closely monitored and any impact on the Capital Programme identified.

33. The Capital Programme is shown at **Appendix A** and summarised in the table below:

CAPITAL PROGRAMME Up to 2027	Current Approved Programme £'000	Programme Revisions £'000	New Approvals £'000	Revised Programme £'000
School Investment Programme & Childrens Services	16,081	0	7	16,089
Inclusive Growth	11,204	(60)	0	11,144
Regeneration	145,885	75	0	145,960
Transportation	24,284	353	200	24,837
Community, Environment, Culture & Leisure	20,274	370	401	21,045
Adults, Health & Wellbeing	5,252	0	9	5,261
Xentrall ICT	900	0	0	900
Council Wide	20,000	0	0	20,000
Total Approved Capital MTFP	243,879	737	617	245,234

Reasons for movements over £100,000

New approvals

Transportation

34. The Greens Beck Culvert £401,000 has been added to the programme. This is funded by grant from the Environment Agency.

35. Newport Bridge works are planned to rectify an imbalance in the structure. The funding for the scheme is from CRSTS which is already included within the capital programme, with additional funding of £200,000 from Middlesbrough Council being added to the programme above.

Programme revisions

Community & Environment, Culture & Leisure

36. £370,000 has been added to the 2025/26 planned maintenance programme. This is funded by MEND grant via The Arts Council for work at Preston Park Museum and Grounds.

Transportation

37. The Thornaby to Stockton Cycleway has additional TVCA funding of £353,000.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

38. As part of the process of making changes to policy or delivery of services, we consider the impact on our communities. No changes to policy or service delivery are proposed as part of this report.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

39. No direct implications.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

40. The report summarises the financial position for 2025/26 based on information for the first quarter of the financial year.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

41. None

RISK ASSESSMENT

42. This update to the MTFP is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

43. Not applicable.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

44. Medium Term Financial Plan Update & Strategy Report to Council 19th February 2025

Name of Contact Officer: Clare Harper
Job Title: Chief Financial Officer
Telephone: 01642 528377
Email Address: Clare.Harper@Stockton.gov.UK

Capital Programme June 2025 – Appendix A

CAPITAL PROGRAMME Up to 2027	Current Approved Programme	Programme Revisions	New approvals	Revised Programme
SCHOOL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME & CHILDRENS SERVICES				
School Investment Programme	15,442,436	0	0	15,442,436
Children Investment	639,007	0	7,254	646,261
SCHOOL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME & CHILDRENS SERVICES	16,081,443	0	7,254	16,088,697
INCLUSIVE GROWTH				
Inclusive Growth & Development	8,453,564	(60,000)	0	8,393,564
Office Accommodation	2,750,000	0	0	2,750,000
INCLUSIVE GROWTH	11,203,564	(60,000)	0	11,143,564
REGENERATION				
Stockton Town Centre Schemes	18,947,601	0	0	18,947,601
Reshaping Town Centres	8,730,275	75,000	0	8,805,275
Billingham Town Centre	30,000,000	0	0	30,000,000
Thornaby Town Centre	33,070,923	0	0	33,070,923
Re-Development of Castlegate Site	30,934,381	0	0	30,934,381
Yarm & Eaglescliffe LUF	23,909,840	0	0	23,909,840
Infrastructure Enhancements, Regeneration & Property Acquisitions	291,717	0	0	291,717
REGENERATION	145,884,737	75,000	0	145,959,737
TRANSPORTATION				
City Regional Sustainable Transport	12,553,782	0	200,000	12,753,782
Other Transport Schemes	10,199,021	352,755	0	10,551,776
Developer Agreements	1,530,973	0	0	1,530,973
TRANSPORTATION	24,283,776	352,755	200,000	24,836,531
COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE & LEISURE				
Energy Efficiency Schemes	400,000	0	0	400,000
Environment and Green Infrastructure	9,048,023	0	401,000	9,449,023
Waste	8,125,939	0	0	8,125,939
Building Management	1,251,758	369,733	0	1,621,491
Vehicle Replacement	1,448,278	0	0	1,448,278
COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE & LEISURE	20,273,998	369,733	401,000	21,044,731
ADULTS, HEALTH & WELLBEING				
Adults & Public Health Investment	202,000	0	0	202,000
Housing Regeneration	1,450,514	0	0	1,450,514
Private Sector Housing	3,599,195	0	8,996	3,608,191
ADULTS, HEALTH & WELLBEING	5,251,709	0	8,996	5,260,705
XENTRALL ICT				
Xentrall ICT Network	900,000	0	0	900,000
XENTRALL ICT	900,000	0	0	900,000
COUNCIL WIDE				
Unallocated council wide invest to save	20,000,000	0	0	20,000,000
COUNCIL WIDE	20,000,000	0	0	20,000,000
Total Approved Capital MTFP	243,879,227	737,488	617,250	245,233,965

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AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

18 SEPTEMBER 2025

REPORT OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

CABINET DECISION

Deputy Leader of the Council - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Paul Rowling

LOCAL GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN (LGSCO) ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2024/25 AND THE NEW COMPLAINTS POLICY

SUMMARY

The report provides Cabinet with details of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) annual review letter for 2024/25. The annual review letter details 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, have been accepted and implemented by the Council.

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure Members are aware of the position regarding complaints to the Ombudsman about the Council and to provide assurance that the Council is responding in line with LGSCO expectations. To ensure Members are aware of the new corporate Complaints Policy.

OMBUDSMAN REPORT

1. Each year the Ombudsman publishes its annual letter and summary of statistics on the complaints and enquiries it has received about Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and the

decisions made. The Council has received the latest report for the financial year ending 31 March 2025.

2. Of the 30 complaints and enquiries dealt with by the Ombudsman in 2024/25, 8 were progressed to investigation, with all 8 of the complaints being upheld. The number of complaints investigated by the LGSCO has decreased since the previous year (13 in 2023/24) suggesting that more complaints are being appropriately resolved and addressed locally without the need for escalation to the Ombudsman.
3. Of the 8 upheld Ombudsman complaint investigations, 3 related to Adults Services, 2 related to SEND and Inclusion, 1 related to Planning, 1 related to Revenues and Benefits and 1 regarding Community Transport.
4. The report details that the LGSCO was satisfied with the remedy offered by the Council (such as an apology, financial redress) in advance of the complainant raising the complaint with the LGSCO, in 3 out of the 8 cases. Remedy guidance for officers undertaking complaint investigations, has been strengthened in the complaints training programme delivered by the Information Governance Team and will also be included in the annual Complaints Officer Forum in the new year.

NEW COMPLAINTS POLICY

5. The Ombudsman published new requirements for council complaint handling in February 2024 in its 'Complaint Handling Code'. In summary, the Code aims to:
 - ensure consistency in complaint handling
 - provide clear guidance around differentiating between service requests (such as reports of potholes and broken street lighting) and complaints
 - focus on improvement and learning from complaints
 - provide complainants with clarity regarding the role of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
 - Encourage greater Member oversight and scrutiny of complaints
6. The Council's Customer Feedback and Complaint Policy will be replaced by a new corporate Complaints Policy to be implemented from 1 January 2026. The Children's and Adult's statutory procedures for complaints are unaffected and remain unchanged.
7. The key changes to the Policy relate to the number of stages and timescales for response, as detailed in the table below. There will no longer be an Early Resolution Stage (i.e. attempt to resolve complaints within the first 5 working days, without a full investigation), and instead there will only be two stages. Where appropriate, the Council will continue to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity, before the complaint is acknowledged and an investigation is undertaken.

Complaint Stage	Acknowledgement	Timescales	Extension (if appropriate)
Stage 1	Within 5 working days	10 working days	10 working days
Stage 2	Within 5 working days	20 working days	20 working days

8. The new Complaint Policy will be implemented from 1 January 2026. Officers responsible for coordinating complaints will be invited to attend briefing sessions in December 2025 to outline the key changes.

9. Following implementation of the new policy, an evaluation will be undertaken after three months to ensure that the Policy is operating effectively.
10. In addition to the new Policy, the Code requires Councils to undertake an annual self-assessment, designate a lead Member for complaints (Councillor Paul Rowling), arrange for complaint performance information to be scrutinised by Members (Executive Scrutiny), and to publish an annual complaints report on the Council's website. A workplan has been developed detailing these requirements and is currently underway to ensure that the Council is fully compliant from 1 April 2026. The workplan will be overseen by the Corporate Governance Group.

FURTHER INFORMATION

11. A copy of the 2024/25 performance tables received from the LGSCO is attached at **Appendix I** of this report. A useful guide to interpretation of the Ombudsman's statistics is available on the [LGSCO website](#).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

12. None as a direct result of this report. The financial implications of individual complaints would be dealt with separately as part of the responses to those complaints.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

13. There are no direct legal implications arising from the report. They may, however, arise on a case-by-case basis, depending on the particular circumstances of the complaint and related decision and Legal Service input is called upon in these cases. The Corporate Governance Group also has a Legal Service representative.

RISK ASSESSMENT

14. LGSCO complaint investigations and associated decision notices create public relations risks to the Council and can undermine resident confidence. The new Complaints Policy and associated procedures are designed to minimise these risks, and the oversight provided by the Complaints Team and Corporate Governance Group provide assurance to senior management and Members that complaints are taken seriously, corrective action is implemented and learning maximised. The new requirements for oversight and scrutiny of complaints, by Members, will ensure that complaints are reviewed, appropriately resolved and any improvements identified.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD / COUNCILLORS

15. The Ombudsman complaints information does not indicate any significant ward specific information or trends.
16. The introduction of the new Complaints Policy will affect all wards and residents who wish to raise complaints with the Council. An Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment has been undertaken to assess the impact of the new Policy on the community.
17. The lead Member for complaints, Councillor Paul Rowling, has been briefed regarding the latest annual complaints report and the new Complaints Policy.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

18. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's annual review of Local Government complaints for 2024/25 has been published and relevant extracts have been included in this report. A copy of the complete report can be viewed on the [LGSCO website](#).
19. Further information regarding the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Code can be found on the [LGSCO website](#).

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Appendix I - Stockton data from the annual report 2024/25

Complaints upheld	
100% of complaints investigated were upheld.	National average of 80% in similar organisations
8 upheld decisions	
4 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents	Average for authorities of Stockton's type is 5.3 upheld decisions per 100, 000
Statistics are based on a total of 8 investigations for the period between 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025	

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations	
100% of cases the Ombudsman were satisfied Stockton had successfully implemented for recommendations.	National average of 100% in similar organisations

Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation	
In 38% of upheld cases the Ombudsman found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman	
3 satisfactory remedy decisions	
Statistics are based on a total of 8 upheld decisions for the period between 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025	

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Corporate Complain Policy

January 2026



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Introduction

This policy sets out the process the Council will follow to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. The purpose of the policy is to enable us to resolve complaints raised by individuals promptly, and to use the data and learning from complaints to drive service improvements. It will also help us to create a positive complaint handling culture amongst officers and individuals. You can also use the policy to share positive feedback about a service you have received, share a suggestion or give general feedback.

The Policy sets out what you can expect when you make a complaint about the Council. We will seek feedback from people who make complaints about how their complaint was handled as part of the drive to encourage a positive complaint and learning culture.

The principles, process and timescales set out in this policy align with the Complaint Handling Code issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, issued under section 23(12A) of the Local Government Act 1974. A copy of the Complaint Handling Code can be found [on the Ombudsman's website](#).

What complaints are covered by the Policy?

The Policy only applies to complaints where there is no statutory process in place. Some complaints about children's services, adult social care and public health are not covered by the expectations set out in this Policy. The Council has separate processes for handling complaints that fall within those areas, and we will tell you which process applies when we acknowledge your complaint.

The Policy does not apply to complaints about the behaviour of a councillor. Detail of how to raise a complaint about a councillor can be found [here](#).

It is important to us that your concerns are heard and understood. The starting point for this is a shared understanding of what constitutes a service request and what constitutes a complaint.

Service requests

Service requests are not complaints but may contain expressions of dissatisfaction. Our aim is to resolve matters before they become a complaint, and we welcome the opportunity to deal with a service request before a complaint is made. A service request is defined as:

“A request that the organisation provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision”.

We will record, monitor and regularly review our handling of service requests and aim to resolve these through our normal service delivery processes. If you are unhappy with our response to a service request, or if the issue persists after you have received a response, you can ask that the issue be considered as a complaint, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. Our efforts to address your service request will not stop if you raise the matter as a complaint.

You can use your 'My Council' account to request a service online or to track progress of existing requests. By signing up to your 'My Council' account, you can also request to subscribe to the Council's monthly newsletter, keeping you up to date with the latest Council developments. [Click here to log in or create a My Council account.](#)

You can request some services without creating an account including:

- [Reporting a missed bin or recycling collection](#)
- [Report a problem with a road, path or street light](#)
- [Apply for or renew an older person's bus pass](#)
- [Contact us about Council Tax](#)
- [Pest control](#)
- [Comment on a planning application or raise a planning enforcement matter](#)

The below does require you to have a My Council account:

- [Applying for a Blue Badge parking permits or appealing a decision](#)

If you can't find what you need on our website, details of how to contact Customer Services can be found [here](#).

What is a complaint?

We define a complaint as:

'An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own officers, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals.'

We will ask you the following questions to help us resolve your complaint:

- **What has gone wrong?** (it is useful for you to provide dates and times where relevant to assist with an investigation).
- **What impact has it had on you?**
- **What would you like us to do to put it right?** (This will help us to understand what you would like to happen as a result of submitting your complaint. We will try to meet desired outcomes however it is not always possible to do so. Should this be the case, an explanation will be provided).

We will also need your name and contact details. If you are submitting a complaint on behalf of someone else, we will need their consent for you to act on their behalf, or proof that you have authority to act for them (such as Power of Attorney).

What is excluded from the complaints process?

There are circumstances when there is a valid reason for not accepting a complaint. Each complaint will be considered on its own merit. Examples of complaints that may not be accepted include:

- **Comments and compliment.** It is helpful to know when we are doing something well and we value your feedback in this respect. To continue to improve our services we welcome compliments, comments and suggestions. We will pass all comments, compliments and feedback to the service and relevant officers.
- **Complaints about a Council policy.** Such comments will be forwarded to the relevant service for consideration. If, however, you feel that you do not have equal access to a Council service, or you have been treated unfairly under a policy, your complaint will be considered under this procedure.
- **Anonymous complaints** (i.e. where you do not provide their name or contact details) will be investigated, however it will not be possible to provide a response. If, however, an anonymous complaint does not provide enough information to enable the Council to investigate or to take further action, the Council will not investigate. Anonymous noise complaints cannot be investigated.
- **Complaints about schools.** All schools have their own complaint procedures and in the first instance complaints should be directed to the schools. However, if you feel your complaint

would not be appropriate to be forwarded to a school, the Council may consider whether it is appropriate under this policy.

- **Complaints about Elected Members/Councillors.** These are reviewed under the Council's Code of Conduct for Members.
- **Insurance Claims.** Complaints involving personal injury and/or loss or damage to property will be dealt with separately by the Council's Insurance Team and not under this policy.
- **Employee Conduct or Behaviour.** Complaints about members or officers behaviour either in isolation or as a wider complaint can be submitted by emailing: foiandcomplaints@stockton.gov.uk. These will always be investigated however depending on the nature of the complaint about the member of officers, it may not be possible to share with you the full details of the investigation and outcome. The Council will decide whether individual action against an employee is required following investigation of a complaint, the details of any action taken is the personal data of the employee and is not shared with you.
- **Complaints about being required to pay full council tax.** Residents can put in an application for a council tax reduction. If the person is not satisfied with the Council's decision on their application, they can ask the Council to review its decision. If the Council refuses to change its decision, they can appeal to the Valuation Tribunal. This is the process set out in law for a person to challenge a Council's decision on their entitlement to a council tax reduction and we generally expect it to be used. We also cannot investigate the terms of our council tax reduction scheme because such policies form part of the Council's annual council tax.
- **Where there is an existing appeals process.** The Council will not deal with complaints where there are existing appeals processes. You will be advised of the relevant appeals process and given details of how to make an appeal. An example of this may be the school admissions panel who deal with matters of dissatisfaction regarding decisions on school placements.
- **Where matters are subject to legal proceedings.** If legal action is being taken either by yourself or by the Council, the Council may not deal with your complaint if it is considered that to do so would prejudice the conduct of those proceedings. There may also be circumstances where a complaint may need to be put on hold until after the legal proceedings have taken place. In either case, you will be informed of the Council's decision.
- **Complaints regarding Data Protection or misuse of personal information.** Complaints regarding Data Protection will be dealt with under the Council's Data Breach procedure. For example, if you think the Council has not handled personal information appropriately.
- **Complaints regarding personnel matters.** Complaints from members of officers regarding matters concerning the workplace will not be dealt with under this policy. Complaints should be reported to a line manager or Human Resources directly. Council officers can confidentially report any concerns about aspects such as fraud or corruption to bullying and harassment in the workplace via the Council's Confidential Reporting Policy.

Under what circumstances might your complaint not be considered or escalated?

We will always provide the reason why a complaint will not be accepted or progressed further after an initial response has been issued. This could be because there is another process that should be followed such as an appeal or because the complaint is late. We will not usually investigate any complaint made more than 12 months after the date of the event /matter that instigated the complaint, or the date that you became aware of it. Time delays can mean that a thorough investigation is no longer possible. Consideration will be given to complaints where there are special circumstances leading to delayed reporting.

Accessibility, Awareness and Advocacy

We want to make it easy for people to raise complaints by providing different channels through which they can do so. This ensures we comply with our duties under the Equality Act 2010. We will make reasonable adjustments for those who may need to access the complaints process. We will keep a record of the adjustments agreed and will keep these under active review.

You can raise a complaint in any way, with any officer. All our officers are aware of the complaints process and can pass details of your complaint to the appropriate person.

Our complaints policy is published on our website and is available in accessible formats. If you require the policy in another format than the one that is available to you, please let us know.

If you want to share your views with the council about a service we provide, but need some support to do this, you can ask someone to act as your 'advocate'. An advocate is someone who can support you to express your views and wishes and can help you to raise a concern or make a complaint. They can contact the council on your behalf if you agree to them doing so. The council will only discuss your concerns with an advocate after you have given your consent for us to do so.

An advocates' role is to listen to your views and concerns and help you to explore your options. They can provide information to help you make an informed decision, accompany you to meetings and contact us on your behalf. An advocate should not give their personal opinion, try to make decisions for you or make judgements about you.

Professional advocacy services can be accessed through some organisations and charities. Friends, family and carers can also act as an advocate.

Below are the details of some advocacy services that are available:

- if you have a mental health need and require support, information is available on our [support for people with mental health needs page](#)
- the [Citizens Advice Bureau](#) can also provide advice and guidance in making a complaint
- if you are a child or young person the [National Youth Advocacy Service](#) can provide individual advocacy and arrange of information, advice and support to ensure your voice is heard when decisions are being made about you

Who will deal with your complaint?

The Council's Information Governance Team is responsible for coordinating the complaint process, including liaison with our regulator the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and reporting to the Council's corporate management team. We will share your complaint with a manager responsible for the issue you are raising, as they have access to officers at all levels to facilitate the prompt and fair resolution of your complaint. Complaint handling is a core service and those responding to complaints will receive training to ensure they prioritise complaint handling and promote a culture of learning and improving services from them.

What to expect when you raise a complaint

Early resolution is key to effective complaint handling. Anyone who expresses dissatisfaction with a service provided to them will be given the opportunity to make a complaint. We recognise that you may be reluctant to make a complaint for fear that it may impact on service you receive in the future. Please be assured that complaining will not impact on the services delivered to you.

The person responding to your complaint will:

- clarify with you any aspects of the complaint they are unclear about.
- deal with your complaint on its merits, act independently, and have an open mind.
- give you a fair chance to set out your position.
- take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and
- consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.

If our response to your complaint is likely to fall outside the timescale set in this Policy, we will write to you to advise when the response will be provided and give the reasons for any delay.

Efforts to remedy a complaint will continue throughout the complaints process without the need for escalation to stage 2 or to the Ombudsman.

We will only share your complaint with the people that need to know about it for us to respond.

What information will we hold about your complaint?

We will keep a full record of your complaint and the outcomes at each stage. This will include the original complaint and date received, all correspondence with you and other parties about your complaint, and any relevant supporting documents such as reports. This will be retained in line with our data retention schedule in line with our obligations under the Data Protection Act 2018.

Expectations of complainant's behaviour

The council appreciates that complaints are sensitive in nature and that you will feel passionate about their concerns and will want to share this with the council. Our officers should always treat you with respect as an individual, listen to your concerns and provide you with the information as necessary.

We expect you to also always behave in a respectful manner through the process. This involves not using unacceptable language, derogatory terms, being personal in nature or threatening, either verbally or in correspondence to the council. If you decide not to behave in a respectful manner, the council will take appropriate action to support and protect its staff. The council has considered the guidance and good practice advice provided by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in dealing with these matters and this is outlined below.

Persistent complainants

The council recognises that having complaints investigated will be important to you and it is committed to resolving complaints where possible. There may be occasions where contact from you becomes so frequent and persistent that it hinders the council's ability to consider the complaint and other individuals' complaints appropriately.

Examples of persistent behaviour include:

- Contacting a number of council officers/one council officer about the same issues and not allowing each officer time to look into concerns and to respond before sending the next piece of correspondence/making contact.
- Contacting a number of council officers/one council officer about the same issue or asking the same questions even though a response to the questions has been given.
- Pursuing a complaint which has completed the council's complaints procedure and/or the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's process, where a final decision has been issued.
- Sending a considerable amount of correspondence to the council asking for updates on complaints when the expected response date has not yet passed.

In these circumstances the council will contact the complainant, usually in writing, to inform and advise that their behaviour is not conducive to council business and will explain the reasons for this. The complainant will be asked to reconsider their contact in future. If the persistence continues, a Senior Officer or Manager will decide whether the circumstances justify a restriction of contact. The individual will be informed of the reason for the decision and for how long the restriction will apply before reconsideration is given. Information relating to how the individual can appeal a decision will also be provided.

Examples of restrictions which may be considered include:

- Restricting contact to one point of contact.
- Restricting how contact can be made.

- Limiting the contact to one form only and for a certain number of times (e.g. one letter per week)
- Restricting telephone calls to specified days or times, or to voice messages only.

The action above will be taken to support officers to consider the complaint and undertake their investigation. In all cases, appropriate records will be kept outlining the reasons for the action which has been taken and a date for when the action should be reviewed.

Unreasonable behaviour and unacceptable language

The council will not tolerate any behaviour which is considered unacceptable, offensive, abusive, threatening or deceitful. The council has a duty of care to its staff and as such will take any necessary action to protect council officers.

You will be informed if your behaviour, actions or language is deemed to be unacceptable and provided with an opportunity to reconsider your actions. Should such behaviour continue after this warning then the council will not correspond with the complainant any further about the complaint or decide not to discuss the complaint further on the phone (i.e. terminating the call).

Officers will also consider if the unacceptable actions are appropriate for the individual to be considered for inclusion on the Employee Protection Register (EPR). The EPR is a register which informs officers of potentially harmful situations by providing effective information. Where appropriate to do so, individuals will be informed if they have been added to this register.

In cases where it is felt that the behaviour is extreme or threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, the council will consider options such as reporting to the Police or taking legal action. In such cases, the council may not give any prior warning.

Where any restrictions are put in place we will ensure we can evidence the reasons for this and will keep any such restrictions under regular review. Any restrictions placed on a complainant's contact due to unacceptable behaviour will be proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

Complaints Stages

Stage 1

Complaints will be responded to as early as possible, taking account of factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the individual is vulnerable or at risk. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided.

We will acknowledge, and log complaints at stage 1 of the complaint procedure within five working days of the complaint being received.

We will provide a full response to stage 1 complaints within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.

If an extension is needed due to the complexity of the complaint we will inform you of the expected timescale for response. Any extension will be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) will be clearly explained. When an extension is applied, we will provide you with details of the Ombudsman.

A complaint response will be issued when the matter has been investigated, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions will be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided.

Complaint responses will address all points raised in the complaint and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate. We will be clear which aspects of the complaint the Council is and is not responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.

The complaint response will provide details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if you are not satisfied with the response.

Should you raise additional complaints during stage 1, these will be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related, and the stage 1 response has not been provided. Where the stage 1 response has been provided, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being considered, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues will be recorded as a new complaint. Depending on when additional complaints are raised, an extension to timescale may be required. We will notify you if this is the case and provided a revised date for response.

Stage 2

If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction at stage 1, you have the right to request that the complaint is progressed to stage 2. Stage 2 is the Council's final response.

We will acknowledge and log requests for stage 2 within five working days of the escalation request being received. Within the acknowledgement, we will set out our understanding of any outstanding issues and the outcomes you are seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, we will ask you for clarification.

Although you are not required to explain your reasons for requesting a stage 2, this will help us to understand why we have been unable to resolve matters and what outcome you are looking for. It is useful if you share this with us when you request that the complaint is escalated.

The person considering the complaint at stage 2 will not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.

We will issue our final response to the stage 2 complaint within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.

If an extension to the timescale is needed due to the complexity of the complaint we will inform you of the expected timescale for response. Any extension will be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) will be clearly explained to you. When an extension is applied, we will provide you with details for the Ombudsman.

The Stage 2 response will confirm the following in clear, plain language:

- the complaint stage.
- the Council's understanding of the complaint.
- the decision on the complaint.
- the reasons for any decisions made.
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right.
- details of any outstanding actions; and
- details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman if you remain dissatisfied.

Stage 2 will be the Council's final response and will involve all suitable officers members needed to issue such a response.

Complaints about a service delivered on behalf of the Council

Where a complaint relates to a third party (e.g. a contractor) Stage 1 will be undertaken by the third party, and Stage 2 will be undertaken by the Council. Any third party providing a service on behalf of the Council will be expected to handle complaints in line with this Policy.

Complaints about the actions of the Council while undertaking its enforcement responsibilities will be addressed under this policy and directed to the LGSCO once a final response has been issued. Complaints about a contracted enforcement firm and agents, will also be addressed within this policy but will be directed to the Enforcement Conduct Board (ECB) once a final response has been issued. The LGSCO and the ECB have a memorandum of understanding detailing how they will work together on such complaints. This can be found [here](#).

Putting Things Right

When a complaint investigation has found that something has gone wrong, we will acknowledge this and set out the actions we have already taken or intend to take to put things right. These can include:

- Apologising.
- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong.
- Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons.
- Taking action if there has been delay.
- Reconsidering or changing a decision.
- Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum.
- Providing a financial remedy.

- Changing policies, procedures or practices.

We will tell you what will happen and by when and we will follow any actions agreed through to completion. If for any reason we cannot deliver an action we have agreed, we will tell you the reason for this, provide details of any alternative actions and remind you of your right to complain to the Ombudsman.

Performance reporting and self-assessment

We will produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which will include:

- an annual self-assessment against the Ombudsman's complaint handling code.
- a qualitative and quantitative analysis of our complaint handling performance, including a summary of the types of complaints we have refused to accept.
- any findings of non-compliance with the complaint handling code.
- service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints;
- the annual letter about our performance from the Ombudsman; and
- any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the Council.

The annual complaints performance and service improvement report will be reported through our governance arrangements and published on the section of our website relating to complaints. The response to the report from the relevant governance arrangement will be published alongside this.

We will also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.

Scrutiny and oversight: continuous learning and improvement

We will look beyond the circumstances of an individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from complaints.

We will promote a positive complaint handling culture and use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive change in service delivery. We will report wider learning and service improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as citizen's panels, officers (through our annual complaints forum) and the relevant Council committee.

We will appoint a Complaints Manager to oversee our complaints handling performance. They will assess themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.

Councillor Paul Rowling will have lead responsibility for complaints in governance arrangements, promoting a positive complaint handling culture. The Complaints Manager will provide them with regular information on complaints that provides an insight into the Council's complaint handling performance. They will have access to suitable information and officers to perform this role and report on their findings.

About the Ombudsman

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman looks at individual complaints about councils and some other organisations providing local public services. It also investigates complaints about all adult social care providers (including care homes and home care agencies) for people who self-fund their care. There are some [limits on what the Ombudsman can look at](#). For example, the Ombudsman may not consider your complaint if they believe you have not been significantly personally affected by the issue you are raising, or if you have a right of appeal to a court or tribunal. The contact details for the Ombudsman are:

Website: www.lgo.org.uk

Telephone: 0300 061 0614

You can also download a version of this wording in Easy Read (pictures and words) format.

How to submit a complaint

You can submit positive feedback, a comment (such as a suggestion or general feedback) or make a complaint by completing our online form.

[Submit a customer feedback or complaints form](#)

Alternatively, you can email foiandcomplaints@stockton.gov.uk or telephone on 01642 527521 between 9am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. You can write to us at:

Information Governance Team,
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council,
Dunedin House,
Columbia Drive,
Thornaby,
Stockton-on-Tees,
TS17 6BJ.

We are unable to address complaints through social media and encourage complaints to be raised with our officers or by using the contacts detailed above.

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

SEPTEMBER 18th 2025

**REPORT OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

KEY DECISION

**Regeneration and Housing - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Richard Eglington
Resources & Transport – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Paul Rowling**

Powering Our Future – Regeneration Mission – Town Hall and Debenhams

SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the Powering Our Futures Regeneration mission delivery of the Central Stockton and North Thornaby Blueprint. The report includes future opportunities for use of existing assets in Stockton town centre which were deferred at the July Cabinet meeting.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)/DECISION(S)

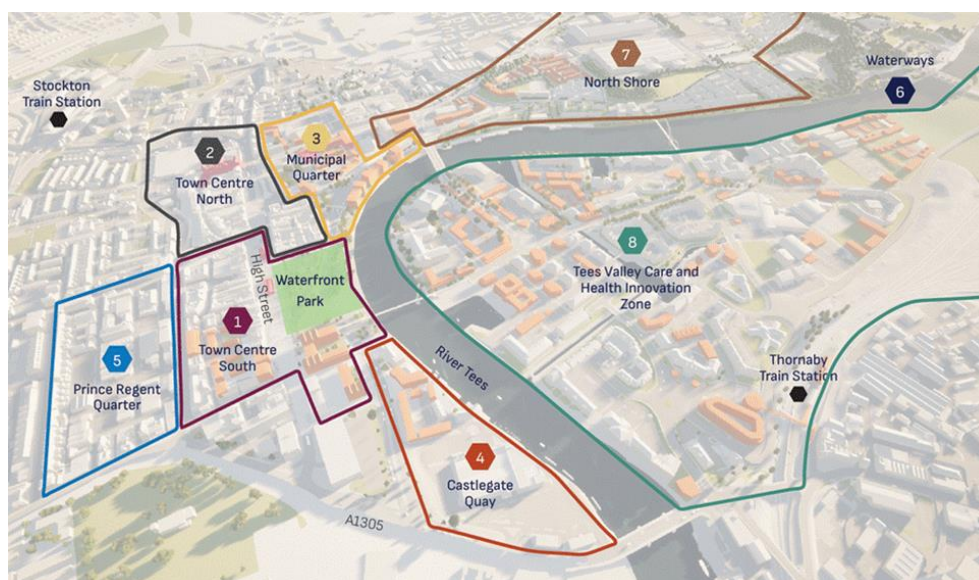
To enable delivery of the projects and programmes within the Regeneration Powering Our Futures Mission.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Delegate the previously agreed allocation of £6.5m 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.

DETAIL

1. In July 2024, Cabinet approved a Blueprint which sets out an exciting and innovative vision for the future development of Central Stockton and North Thornaby areas. The blueprint outlines 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 is a safe and welcoming place where people want to work, live and visit. It focuses on eight key intervention areas in Central Stockton and North Thornaby (illustrated below):



2. This report provides an update on interventions to support retail in Stockton Town Centre and commercial opportunities for existing Council land and assets.

Stockton Waterfront

3. Work is progressing at pace across the entirety of the Waterfront development site following the smooth transition to a full working site after the closure of Riverside Road in May. Notable works in recent weeks have seen the removal of the old Riverside Road, installation of the first beams to form the land bridge deck and further installation of paving across the northern section of the park. Work is on track to complete on this transformational development in Spring 2026.
4. In March, the Community Diagnostic Centre (CDC) became operational and has continued to increase patient capacity month by month since opening. The scheme is an outstanding example of strong partnership working between public sector bodies to bring about completion of the largest new build CDC in England.

Town Centre Living

5. The July report outlined proposals to develop a series of residential led developments across the waterfront and former post office site between the High Street and West Row, Municipal Buildings and adjacent sites including Riverside Car Park. These sites, along with the Dairy Car Park site, will form part of a portfolio of development sites in the Stockton town centre area and the Council will procure a development partner to bring forward residential led redevelopment on these sites. This will include an assessment of

commercial use types including, mixed tenure housing including affordable housing, student residential and residential needs linked to growth in the Care and Health sector, build to rent and hotel and aparthotel beds. All these use types will contribute to increased town centre vibrancy, support economic growth and assist with scheme viability.

6. The Council and Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) have already agreed a delivery partnership approach to the development of the Municipal Quarter, with TVCA and Stockton Borough Council (SBC) contributing £450,000 each to develop a delivery proposition. In July the Council agreed to supplement this with £550,000 to support delivery of the Central Stockton and North Thornaby blueprint allocated in September 2024 to fund the development of masterplans, business cases and delivery proposals.

Stockton Town Hall

7. In July 2023 Cabinet approved the appointment of architects to develop outline design proposals to relocate the Registrars service within Stockton Town Hall. Space Architects were commissioned to produce plans to the end of RIBA Stage 2 and in July 2024, Cabinet approved detail design works to the end of RIBA Stage 4 with an indicative final scheme cost of £6.5m.
8. During the early stages of the detailed design phase of works, it became apparent that due to the constraints of delivering a scheme within a Grade II* listed building, alongside the accessibility and statutory needs of the Registrars service, the Town Hall could not be adapted to fully meet all the functions of the Registrars service.
9. It is however essential that this Grade II* listed building which is a key focal point in the heart of the town, is brought back into use and that any future use will celebrate its history and attractive civic setting. It is therefore recommended that options to restore the building for its' original civic use should be explored, alongside other ground floor use opportunities which better compliment the wider retail, leisure and cultural offer of the town centre.
10. It is proposed that this includes using the Council Chamber for civil partnership, wedding and civic ceremonies, maintaining its grandeur and civic function. The options appraisal will assess the potential to relocate the Visitor Information Centre on the ground floor, alongside a series of flexible rooms at both ground and first floor level, which could be used by front facing Council services. This could include, but is not limited to, consultation rooms, meeting rooms, exhibition space and touch down spaces. Works and designs done to date will inform final designs and it is proposed that the final design and commissioning of works is delegated to the Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport to be funded from the remainder if the £6.5m budget already allocated for this purpose.

Debenhams

11. The former Debenhams department store building was historically in two separate ownerships. The 'rear' part of the building is included within the Wellington Square Shopping Centre ownership boundary, which the Council acquired in 2019. The 'original' main building, fronting onto the High Street, was privately owned but transferred into the hands of receivers in 2018 whilst Debenhams were in occupation as leaseholders.
12. The building services, utilities, fire alarms etc were all located in the front part of the building which did not have any impact when Debenhams were operating the building as one.

13. Debenhams went into administration and ceased trading in January 2020. The property has remained vacant since that time. The property was marketed for sale shortly after it became vacant.
14. The property was then offered for sale at auction in October 2023. Given that the rear portion of the building could not be let without access to building control systems located in the front portion the Council agreed a purchase price with the auctioneers in advance of the auction date and completed the purchase in November 2023 to make the building into one asset.
15. Due to the scale of the building (circa 90,000 square feet), there is limited demand for a building of this type in its current form. This trend has been observed nationwide. In recent years, retailers such as Debenhams, BHS, House of Fraser and Wilko's ceased trading, resulting in 771 vacant properties. As of January 2024, 75% of those properties remained vacant.
16. The building occupies a prominent position at the northern end of the High Street, next to The Globe, with a separate entrance in Wellington Square. This is a key town centre asset to be brought back into use for the benefit and vitality of the town and its community.
17. The blueprint identified the former Debenhams as an ideal location to enhance the town's already thriving daytime and nighttime economies by offering accommodation that a wide range of potential users can occupy, complement the existing user mix in the town centre and maximise its commercial sustainability. This could include, but is not limited to, a creative and digital "hub", market food hall, community health facilities and leisure uses.
18. Other significant benefits could be achieved by bringing the building back into use, including job creation, private sector investment, increased visitor spend and enhanced footfall.

Small Business Space

19. Against a national backdrop of diminishing retail activity in Town Centres, as a result of increased online and out of town shopping habits, the Central Stockton blueprint set out plans to concentrate retail provision in the town centre around the successful Wellington Square, to support and maintain retail vibrancy. Wellington Square shopping centre was acquired by SBC alongside the Castlegate Centre to create a concentrated retail core in Stockton town centre and to deliver the blueprint vision. The units in the centre are well occupied and the centre is well used with footfall of c300k visits a month. The units are a combination of large retail floorplates like Debenhams, with a majority being smaller single or double fronted shop units. The costs associated with such units can still be a barrier to small start-up traders and we are aware of strong interest from small businesses looking for affordable trading space in an already successful retail core. This space does not currently exist.
20. There are currently a small number of vacant units owned by SBC in and around Wellington Square that are vacant that could be split to reduce start-up costs for small businesses. It is recommended that a small capital budget is allocated to create good trading spaces for small businesses and support our local independent retail sector.
21. To support the re-use of the Town Hall and Debenhams and increase small business space in the town centre which will deliver on the agreed blueprint, it is recommended that the previously agreed £6.5m capital budget for redevelopment of Stockton Town Hall be used 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. Change SBC retail units in the town centre to meet the needs of small businesses.

22. it is 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.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

Proposals in this report have been the subject of an Equality & Poverty Impact Assessment.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

There are no corporate parenting implications in this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The £6.5m outlined in the report to deliver interventions within the Town Hall and Debenhams is in the approved capital programme.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Legal advice will be sought throughout the projects to ensure that all financial and property agreements (eg leases) and contracts are lawful, meet the Council's requirements and follow the Council's governance procedures.

RISK ASSESSMENT

This matter in this report is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report To Cabinet Central Stockton and North Thornaby Blueprint September 2024
Powering Our Futures Regeneration Mission update – July 2025

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REPORT TO CABINET

18 SEPTEMBER 2025

**REPORT OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Lead Cabinet Member – Regeneration and Housing – Cllr Richard Eglington

Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030

SUMMARY

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

The Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 reflects 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.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)/DECISION(S)

The Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 sets out Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's commitment to preventing homelessness and reducing rough sleeping across the borough. It ensures compliance with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and aligns with national Government's strategic priorities to end rough sleeping and prevent homelessness. The strategy supports the vision of the Stockton-on-Tees Plan, particularly its ambition to reduce inequalities and improve outcomes for residents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is asked to:

1. Approve the Stockton-on-Tees Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030.

DETAIL

Local Strategic Context

1. The Stockton-on-Tees Plan sets 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 our diverse communities live happy and healthy lives and that we support those who are experiencing poverty and disadvantage.

2. In developing the refreshed strategy, consideration has been given to the current 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 are experiencing or threatened with homelessness is not isolated to our borough, rather it is a national issue. The demand for homelessness services can 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).
3. During the same period (2021/22 to 2024/25) demand for temporary accommodation also increased, again consistent with national trends. Whilst the council has a range of commissioned temporary accommodation services, demand has 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 works to minimise the length of an individual/family stay in emergency accommodation.
4. In addition to preventing and supporting those who experience homelessness the strategy also aims to support individuals who may be sleeping rough. Whilst the numbers of those who sleep rough within our borough are not high, this is the most visible and often extreme form of homelessness. Whilst homelessness may be the presenting issue, many individuals have complex lives shaped by personal vulnerabilities such as mental health, substance and alcohol abuse, trauma and an offending history. These circumstances require 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).

Vision and Strategic Priorities

5. The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping 2025-2030 Strategy sets a vision "**to minimise homelessness, eliminate rough sleeping and ensure our residents are supported by relevant partners to access a place they are able to call home**". This vision reflects the council's determination to end homelessness within our borough. To achieve this, the strategy outlines four strategic priorities designed to ensure the Council is equipped to address current and future challenges. These priorities also support the Homelessness Service and its internal and external providers in delivering positive outcomes for our most vulnerable residents.
6. The 4 strategic priorities are:
 - 1) Prevent and relieve homelessness
 - 2) Prevent rough sleeping
 - 3) Efficient use of temporary and supported accommodation, and
 - 4) Working in partnership

Consultation

7. To ensure that the strategy is reflective and shaped by our 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 our

commissioned temporary accommodation sites to facilitate direct conversations with those with lived experience of homelessness.

8. The consultation survey sought views on the four strategic priorities. The high level results of the survey are summarised below:

- Strategic Priority 1: Prevent and relieve homelessness
 - **Strongly agree – 83.9%**
 - Agree – 14.5%
 - Neither Agree nor Disagree – 1.6%
 - Disagree – 0%
 - Strongly Disagree – 0%

- Strategic Priority 2: Prevent rough sleeping
 - **Strongly Agree – 80.65%**
 - Agree - 16.13%
 - Neither Agree nor Disagree – 1.61%
 - Disagree – 1.61%
 - Strongly Agree – 0%

- Strategic Priority 3: Efficient use of temporary accommodation
 - **Strongly Agree – 72.58%**
 - Agree – 22.58%
 - Neither Agree nor Disagree – 3.23%
 - Disagree – 1.6%
 - Strongly Disagree – 0%

- Strategic priority 4: Working in Partnership
 - **Strongly Agree – 77.42%**
 - Agree – 19.35%
 - Neither Agree nor Disagree – 3.23%
 - Disagree – 0%
 - Strongly Disagree – 0%

9. As members will note, the survey findings demonstrate support for the 4 proposed strategic priorities.

Moving the strategy forward

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

Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment

11. An Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment has been completed. No group or individual who possesses a protected characteristic, or who has experienced care, poverty or substance misuse/addiction will be negatively impacted by the implementation of the proposed strategy. Conversely the assessment has highlighted that individuals with a disability, young adults, care leavers, those who are experiencing poverty or substance misuse/addiction may be positively impacted by the implementation of the strategy.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

12. The draft Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025 – 2030 recognises youth homelessness and the importance of working collaboratively to prevent it, particularly for the boroughs care leavers and care experienced young people. Established protocols are in place with the aim of ensuring a clear, streamlined pathway to help each care leaver secure independent, appropriate and secure accommodation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

13. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

14. The Homelessness Act 2002 (Section 1 (1) places a statutory duty on Housing Authorities to conduct a homelessness review of their borough and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review every 5 years (as a minimum). Additional duties introduced via the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 require local authorities to produce a strategy that involves partners in earlier identification and intervention to prevent homelessness. All local authorities are required to publish a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

RISK ASSESSMENT

15. The implementation of the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025 - 2030 is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

16. The strategy will support residents living in all wards across the borough. Ward members were not consulted in the development of the draft strategy.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030

Regeneration and Inclusive Growth

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Foreword

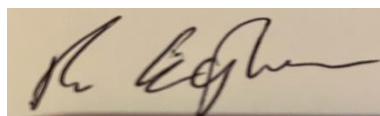
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council understand the importance of tackling homelessness and ensuring that our Borough is a place where our residents live happy and healthy lives, as well as being a great place to work live and visit. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local housing authorities to develop a strategic approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping and to publish a homelessness strategy. It is important that our Strategy is regularly reviewed and updated to ensure it addresses the needs of those within our borough who are at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping, meets national policy priorities and reflects any relevant changes in relevant legislation. Following consultation with our service users and key partners, as the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing I am pleased to present Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's refreshed Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy which sets out our vision, strategic direction and priorities for the period 2025-2030.

There are many and varied factors which can contribute to an individual or family experiencing homelessness, for example poverty, unemployment, cost of living challenges, the lack of affordable housing and family breakdown. These risk factors can also be exacerbated by personal vulnerabilities such as mental health and substance abuse, trauma, domestic abuse, offending, sudden serious illness, divorce, death of a partner, and disabilities.

Given the complexities of homelessness, we cannot work in isolation. Our strategy provides a framework for how we will engage early with those who need our services, our partners and wider stakeholders (including our local communities, Registered Providers, Government agencies, private landlords and our wider voluntary and community partners) to intervene and prevent homelessness and offer appropriate services as we understand that homelessness can be a very damaging experience for individuals and families.

This strategy details how we will work to mitigate and address the challenges associated with homelessness and rough sleeping and is accompanied by an action plan, which will be monitored (and were appropriate updated) on a quarterly basis.

We are determined to act, in partnership with our stakeholders and local communities to reduce inequality and prioritise prevention, as reinforced within our Stockton-on-Tees Plan and the Powering our Futures Programme. As a Council we believe everyone should have a warm, safe and secure place to live and I am confident that this strategy will have a positive impact on our commitment to tackling homelessness within our Borough.



Councillor Richard Eglington
Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing

Developing the Strategy

This Strategy has been developed using a collaborative, inclusive and evidence-led approach, to ensure it is reflective of the experiences of our residents and, crucially, to ensure that our stakeholder partners (across all sectors) can contribute towards its delivery. We recognise that through collaboration, we can achieve better outcomes together.

Several means of consultation have been used to capture the views of our service users, providers, and stakeholders. These include hosting focus groups, administering a survey, and holding interactive sessions within our temporary accommodation sites to secure the experiences of those with lived experience of homelessness. Feedback has informed both the content of our strategy, how our strategic priority aims will be achieved and re-affirmed the importance of collaboration with stakeholders.

The National Agenda

It is important to acknowledge that the national Government agenda has a wide-ranging impact on local homelessness services. Government is currently in the process of creating a long-term strategy to “end homelessness once and for all”¹. Once received we will review our Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to ensure it remains up to date and reflects national priorities.

In 2022, the Government of the day published the document ‘Ending Rough Sleeping for Good’, which set out a national commitment to ensure that ‘no one in our society would have to suffer the injustice of living a life on the streets, deprived of shelter, warmth, and necessities’². This has been considered within our strategy.

In addition to the above, there are also imminent legislative changes which will impact on homelessness both nationally and locally. Specifically, the Renters Rights Bill, which delivers on the Government’s manifesto commitment to transform the experience of private renting, including a provision to abolish Section 21 ‘no fault’ evictions and the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 which aims to regulate supported exempt accommodation. A requirement of this Act will be the introduction of a licensing regime for supported housing and a set of national supported housing standards and a requirement for local authorities to publish a Supported Housing Strategy. Work is ongoing in preparation of the formal implementation of these Acts.

Recently Government has also set ambitious national housebuilding targets which include a commitment to bring forward investment to deliver “*the biggest increase in affordable housing building in a generation*” (confirmed in the 2025 summer Spending Review).

Finally, our strategy has also evolved to take into consideration the Comprehensive Spending Review which was announced in June 2025.

Stockton-on-Tees Plan 2024

The Stockton-on-Tees Plan sets out the Councils vision for the future of the Borough. Our Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy aligns with this Plan, specifically the Council’s aim to ensure that our diverse communities live happy and healthy lives and that we support those who are experiencing poverty and disadvantage. As outlined within the Stockton-on-Tees Plan, the delivery of

¹ [Largest ever cash boost to turn the tide on homelessness - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/largest-ever-cash-boost-to-turn-the-tide-on-homelessness)

² [Ending Rough Sleeping for Good \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/108422/ending-rough-sleeping-for-good.pdf)

these priorities will require strong and effective partnerships, a theme also at the core of this Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy and supporting Action Plan.

The Stockton-on-Tees plan also highlights the Council's aim to make the Borough a great place to live, work and visit, which will be supported through the provision of a diverse housing offer including affordable housing tenures.

Powering Our Future

To ensure the Council is set up to achieve the priorities of the Stockton-on-Tees Plan, we have developed a new, cross cutting Mission Statement for the council to Power Our Future which details how we will work as a Council and is underpinned by five supporting Missions. This strategy has been developed to ensure we both align and support the 'Powering Our Communities' and 'Powering Our Partnerships' missions and by doing so achieve more favourable outcomes for those residents of our borough who may require the support and assistance of our homelessness services.

Complementary Strategies

As well as reinforcing the Council's core strategic documents, this strategy also has direct alignment and will support the delivery of a number of wider Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council strategies. These include the Stockton-on-Tees Domestic Abuse Strategy, the Council's Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Stockton-on-Tees Community Safety Strategy, the Fairer Stockton-on-Tees Strategic Framework, the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and as noted above the Stockton-on-Tees Plan.

Key achievements during 2024-2025

Despite the challenges noted previously, key achievements within the last financial year have included:

- The number of people new to rough sleeping within our borough has been reduced by 37%.
- The number of relief cases accepted has reduced by 10% (from 806 in 2023/24 to 732 in 2024/25).
- The number of rough sleepers who have moved on to medium term accommodation has risen by 8%.
- The number of 'move-ons' from commissioned temporary accommodation into independent accommodation has increased by 11%.
- We have reviewed our service delivery model and introduced a Rough Sleeper and Repeat Homelessness Team which provides bespoke support to those who are at risk of homelessness and have complex circumstances.
- We have established quarterly multi-agency meetings to ensure that relevant information and examples of best practice are shared.
- We have increased access to dispersed homelessness accommodation for families.
- Our 'Homefinder' role has been successful in securing accommodation for homeless households, ensuring positive outcomes for our residents.

Our Borough

Stockton-on-Tees is a borough of contrasts made up of a mixture of busy town centres, urban conurbations, and picturesque villages. The borough covers approximately 20,000 Hectares (equal to 200 square kilometres) and is home to 196,587 residents (expected to rise to 200,440 by 2030), living in 91,154 dwellings (2025). According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2019), the borough is ranked 73rd most deprived out of the 317 local authorities in England. There are 27 wards within Stockton-on-Tees, nine of which are in the 10% most deprived wards in the country. This is reinforced by the Borough's significant life expectancy gap, with men in Ingleby Barwick East living 16.7 years longer than men residing within Stockton Town Centre, and women living 18.5 longer within the same comparable areas. Furthermore, 58.9% of households in Stockton-on-Tees have an income of under £30,000, with 17% having a household income below £15,000. This reinforces the socio-economic challenges facing the residents of our Borough, which has a significant consequential impact on their access to suitable housing.

The 2021 Census showed that there had been some significant changes to the population of the borough since the 2011 Census. Some key statistics are shown below:

- The population of Stockton-on-Tees now stands at 196,600 (Census 2021), an increase of 2.6%, since 2011. This is projected to increase further to 211,005 by 2039. The borough remains the largest Council area in the Tees Valley by population size.
- There was also an increase in the number of people aged 65 and over of 3.9%, with the largest increase of 2.3% being between the ages of 65 to 74. The number of people between the ages of 16 to 64, generally referred to as the working age population, fell by 3.6%.

Housing Tenure

One notable statistical change between the 2011 and 2021 Census, is that Stockton-on-Tees experienced the second-largest percentage-point fall of the North East local authorities in the proportion of households that owned their home, falling from 68.5% in 2011 to 66.2% in 2021. A decrease of 2.3%. The 2021 census found that 17% of the population of Stockton-on-Tees are now renting from a private landlord which is an increase of 3.9% from 2011.

In April 2025 the average house price in Stockton-on-Tees was £169,000, lower than the national average of £265,000³. However, housing within the current market is still priced above the reach of those on low incomes. Whilst the average salary in Stockton-on-Tees is £33,691⁴ in the most deprived wards, annual income is less than £15,000 per annum.

Private Sector Housing

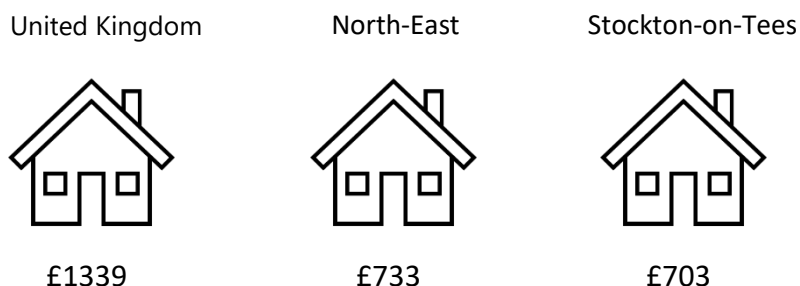
In 2024 the number of people who are renting a property within the private sector (nationally) increased to 19%⁵. The data below details average monthly rental rates within Stockton-on-Tees, which have increased by 10.5% since May 2024.

³ ONS [Housing prices in Stockton-on-Tees \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

⁴ [Average earnings \(Gross weekly pay FT workers\) NOMIS](#)

⁵ [English Private Landlord Survey 2024: main report - GOV.UK](#)

National Comparison
Average Monthly Rent May 2025⁶



Although the Borough's rental fees are lower than both the national and regional average, as mentioned previously, there are 27 wards within Stockton-on-Tees, nine of which are in the 10% most deprived wards in the country. The gap between the average private rent rate and the Local Housing Allowance rates (as detailed below) is notable.

The average rental price, according to the Office for National Statistics, as of May 2025 in Stockton-on-Tees by numbers of bedrooms and property type is detailed within the tables below⁷:

Number of Bedrooms	Per Calendar Month	Price Per Week
One Bedroom	£511	£118
Two Bedroom	£638	£147
Three Bedroom	£760	£175
Four or More Bedrooms	£1131	£261

Property Type	Per Calendar Month	Price Per Week
Flats and Maisonettes	£600	£138
Terraced Properties	£705	£163
Semi Detached Properties	£751	£173
Detached Properties	£1048	£242

The average rental price per calendar month across all property types is £776.

The Local Housing Allowance rates for Stockton-on-Tees (table below), are set nationally. When compared to the above table, the weekly Local Housing Allowance rates do not meet the weekly rental costs of any tenure. This puts pressure on individuals to meet the shortfall from other allowances or benefits. Where this is not feasible (affordable), many seek the support of the Homelessness Service and other council welfare support services.

Number of Bedrooms	Weekly LHA Rate – April 2025
Shared Accommodation Rate	£66.50
One Bedroom	£94.36
Two Bedroom	£109.32
Three Bedroom	£126.58
Four Bedroom	£172.60

⁶ ONS [Housing prices in Stockton-on-Tees](#)

⁷ [Housing prices in Stockton-on-Tees](#)

Demand for Social/Affordable Housing

The availability of social/affordable rented housing is not maintaining pace with demand within our borough. In March 2025, there were 2960 Stockton residents (individuals or families) registered on the Tees Valley Homefinder platform. Between April 2024 and March 2025, an average of 18 properties were advertised per week and each advert attracted on average, 90 bids. It is also worth noting that the ‘type’ of affordable housing that becomes available for letting does not match the household make-up of our Housing Register and those who have presented to our homelessness service. For example, between April 2024 to March 2025, there were no one-bedroom properties built within the borough which were made available for letting as affordable housing. Within the same period, 195 one-bed properties social/affordable rented properties were advertised on Tees Valley Homefinder, unfortunately this is vastly outweighed by the number of individuals with an active Tees Valley Homefinder account, who require a one-bed properties (1,504)⁸.

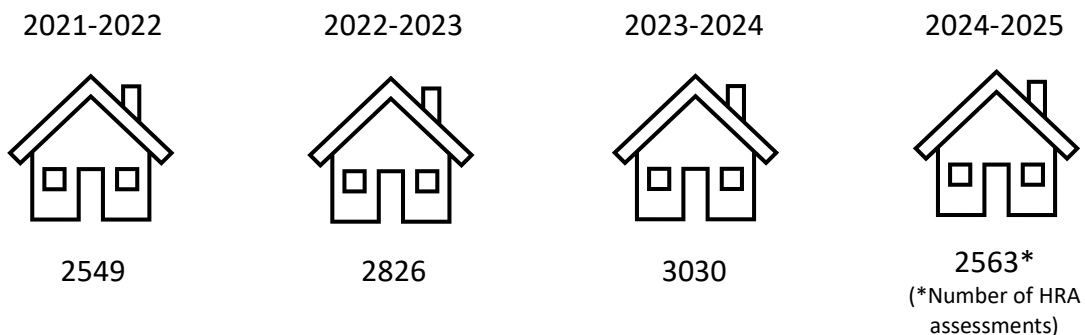
In 2025, the Council, along with other members of the Tees Valley Lettings Partnership, agreed (following consultation) to implement a revised Common Allocations Policy to ensure that those who are most in need can be supported into appropriate and suitable accommodation to prevent, or relieve, homelessness.

Given the limited supply of affordable housing within our borough, the Council has recently undertaken an option appraisal to explore how we can accelerate the provision of additional affordable housing (of all tenures) in our borough. Following the conclusion of this exercise, approval has been secured to move forward on a Hybrid Delivery model (enabling, direct delivery and partnerships). This will include delivery on affordable housing (all types and tenures) on council owned sites and within our broader regeneration plans.

Our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Services in Context⁹

Presentations to the Service

Number of presentations¹⁰ to the homelessness service*:



⁸ Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Lettings and Nominations Data

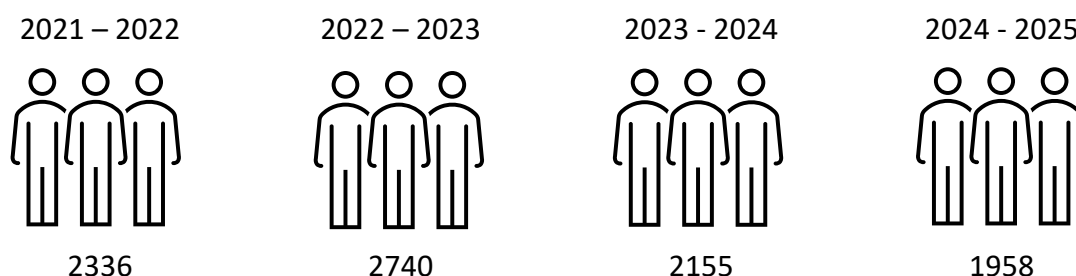
⁹ Housing and FSoT 2023-2024 BUP

¹⁰ A presentation refers to the point at which a person makes themselves known to the service as homeless.

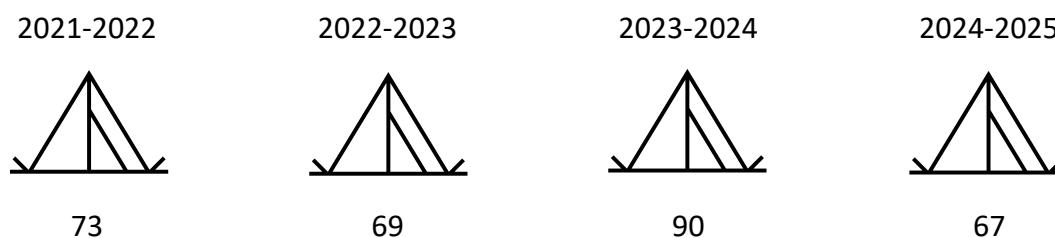
The above information demonstrates a general trend in an annual increase in the number of people presenting as homeless or threatened with homelessness within the borough. The number of homelessness presentations increased by 481 between 2021 to 2024 (an increase of almost 19% over three years). During the period 2023 to 2024, there was a significant increase in the number of people presenting to the service, specifically, an additional 204 presentations were made (an increase of 7.2%). Whilst the number of presentations made to the service are no longer monitored, the number of Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) assessments completed in the 2024-2025 financial year was 2,563, which provides a more reflective insight into the number of individuals in Stockton-on-Tees who perceive themselves to be homeless, or who are at risk of homelessness, and seek the support of the Homelessness Service.

Our Homelessness Service deliver the statutory homelessness duties on behalf of the Government. The primary duties are Prevention and Relief, both are set out within the Housing Act 1996, and have been amended by legislation which has followed, such as the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. As set out within the Homelessness code of guidance for Local Authorities¹¹, Prevention Duty requires the Council to take reasonable steps to help prevent any eligible person (regardless of priority need status, intentionality and whether they have a local connection) who is threatened with homelessness from becoming homeless. Given that the Government emphasise the importance of preventing homelessness, the Council's stance is reflective of this. According to the same Government guidance, the Relief Duty requires housing authorities to help people who are homeless to secure accommodation. For those who have vulnerabilities as defined within the Housing Act 2002, the Council are required to secure emergency accommodation.

Number of accepted prevention and relief cases (combined):



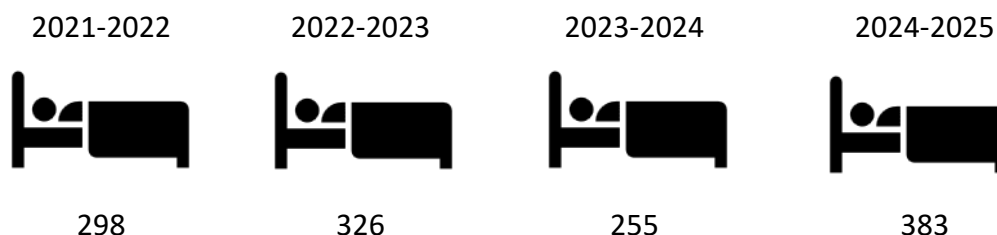
Number of verified rough sleepers:



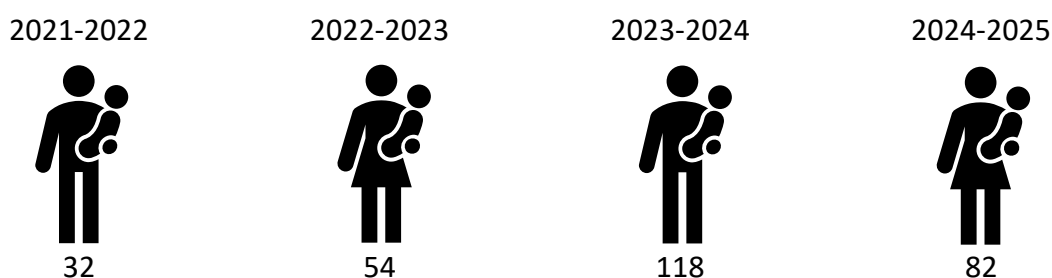
- Between 2021 and 2024, there has been a 23% rise in the number of verified rough sleepers, highlighting that the increase in rough sleeping is a significant challenge facing the Homelessness Service.
- During the financial year 2024/25, the number of verified rough sleepers reached its lowest level since 2021. However, we acknowledge that there is still work to be done to ensure that this number continues to fall during the lifetime of this Strategy.

¹¹ [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities - Overview of the homelessness legislation - Guidance - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities-overview-of-the-homelessness-legislation)

Number of families and single people placed into Emergency Accommodation:



Number of children placed into Emergency Accommodation:



- Of the 82 families which were placed into emergency accommodation in 2024/25, 29 (35.3%) remained within the emergency placement for longer than 21 days.
- The number of single people who were placed into emergency accommodation in 2024/2025 was 301. This is a rise of 219.7% compared to the previous year.
- Of the 301 single people who were placed into emergency accommodation, 56 of them remained within the placement for longer than 56 days (18.6%).

The top three reasons for presentation to the Homelessness Service are:

- 1) Individuals are asked to leave accommodation by friends and family,
- 2) Termination of tenancies by private landlords, and
- 3) The requirement to flee Domestic Abuse occurring within the home.

Key challenges faced by the Homelessness Service

Cost-of-Living

Increasing interest rates has resulted in rent rises with affordability in the private rented sector pricing many of our residents who would previously resolve their own housing challenges out of the market. The average rental cost as of May 2025 being £776 across all property types. In addition interest and inflation rates increased significantly during the lifetime of our previous strategy, with the cost of consumer goods

and services increasing by 9.6% in October 2022¹². This resulted in a significant increase to mortgage repayments and household bills. At the time of writing, the Bank of England interest rate is 4.25%¹³.

Complexity of Cases

We have seen an increasing number of very complex cases presenting to the service, often involving a combination of issues, for example substance abuse, mental health challenges and offending behaviour. Individuals with complex needs frequently struggle to sustain tenancies due to a lack of understanding or capability around basic budgeting coupled with the impact of harmful lifestyle choices and behaviours have a negative impact on their tenancy.

Some individuals and families who are homeless have additional health issues. To address this, we have a named outreach nurse funded by Public Health to work directly with those who require additional health support.

Limited Supply of Social and Affordable Housing

The context around the limited availability of social and affordable Housing within the borough has been referenced previously. However, it is appropriate to acknowledge that this is one of the key challenges faced and is one of the key reasons why our residents opt for private rented accommodation, albeit this is also becoming more challenging. Whilst the Council are strategically planning, alongside partners, to increase the availability of affordable housing, the current supply is unable to meet demand.

Increasing use of Private Sector Accommodation

Nationally, the number of households which are residing within privately rented accommodation has risen from 13.1% in 2011, to 17% in 2021 (Census, 2021). Alongside this, there has been a significant rise in the cost associated with residing in privately rented property. In February 2024, the average monthly rental figure in Stockton-on-Tees was £622 per month, whereas in February 2025, this figure rose to £692 per month. This, consequently, means that households living in privately rented accommodation in Stockton-on-Tees have, on average, experienced an 11.3% rise in the cost of their core rent over the course of one year (MHGLC).

In addition, between 2019 and 2022, the proportion of households in the North-East who were homeless, or at risk of homelessness as a result of Section 21 evictions increased by 88%, compared to a rise of 18% nationally (MHCLG).

Rising use of Temporary Accommodation and Length of Stay

Earlier statistics on the use of emergency accommodation and the time it takes for service users to move on into medium and long-term accommodation highlight a significant challenge facing the council. This trend not only places a financial pressure on the Council but also has a considerable impact on those placed in such accommodation, especially children and vulnerable adults.

Organised Crime Group (OCG) Activity

Whilst the number of reported crimes in Stockton-on-Tees has decreased, criminal activity continues to impact the Homelessness Service. For instance, the service will be required to support individuals who are at risk of harm due to the actions (or anticipated actions) of organized crime group OCG members. This includes not only direct victims, but also their family members and associates. OCG activity, therefore, remains a challenge for the service¹⁴.

¹² [Cost of living latest insights - Office for National Statistics](#)

¹³ [Interest rates and Bank Rate | Bank of England](#)

¹⁴ [Crime and disorder in Stockton-on-Tees, 2024 Q4 \(12 months ending\) | LG Inform](#)

Increase in Rough Sleeping

Previous statistics highlight that rough sleeping is a significant challenge in Stockton-on-Tees. Whilst our Outreach Support Team conduct regular engagement attempts with individuals who are rough sleeping (both those who are known to sleep rough and those new to rough sleeping), it is often the case that individuals do not want to engage with Officers. This results in difficulty when attempting to implement a tailored plan for the individual to enter secure, long-term accommodation.

Youth Homelessness

Additionally, there is an increasing number of care leavers between the ages of 16-25 who require a long-term placement to transition to, in order to avoid becoming homeless. As a corporate parent, the Council understand the importance of providing crucial support to care leavers, and have, therefore, established internal protocols between the Homelessness and Housing Solutions Team, Children's Services and Adult Social Care to ensure that there is a clear, streamlined path for each care leaver. The pathway will enable services and the individual to create and fulfil a plan to enter long-term accommodation, which will ensure stability, and a fulfilling future. Despite this pathway, unfortunately there will be instances where care experienced young people (those aged between 16-25 years) become homeless.

Anticipated Future Challenges

While steps are being taken to prevent homelessness and positively support those at risk of becoming homeless we continue to anticipate challenges. These include, for example:

- Managing the expectations of those at risk of homelessness in terms of securing access to accommodation based on an individual's available budget verses their aspirations. For example following a financial assessment, individuals who are at risk of homelessness may not have the financial means to afford the rent on a property they are seeking to secure i.e. a household with a 2 bedroom need maybe actively bidding on a 3 bedroom property. This is not always well received. In these circumstances it is vital that we manage the expectations of the individual.
- The need for a wider dispersal of supported housing properties within the borough to help people re-connect with families and communities.
- The current and future economic landscape continues to present challenges (continued rental increases in the private rented sector, Local Housing Allowance rates not reflecting market rents, continual rises in the cost of living, or due to competition for accommodation landlords requesting guarantors).
- Legislative challenges, including the implementation of the Renters Rights Bill, which may result in private landlords deciding to exit the market, potentially leading to an increase in presentations to the Homelessness Service. Currently, it is also unclear if one of the unintended consequences of the implementation of the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 is increase in homeless presentations if landlords do not apply for a licence and/or again decide to exit the market.
- Whilst the recently announced three-year funding settlement for local authorities is welcome, ongoing uncertainty surrounding long-term funding to tackle homelessness limits our ability to plan strategically. It also affects our capacity to recruit and retain experienced staff particularly where roles are dependent short-term funding.

In summary the preceding sections of the strategy highlight the significant challenges faced by the residents of our borough and particularly those who are unable to purchase their own homes or access either social or affordable private rented accommodation.

Our Vision and Strategic Priorities

The Vision

Our Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-30 is intended to convey the Council's determination to end homelessness within our Borough. **Our vision is to minimise homelessness, eliminate rough sleeping and ensure our residents are supported by relevant partners to access a place they are able to call home.**

To ensure that the appropriate action is taken to achieve our vision our strategy is underpinned by four strategic priorities:

1. **Prevent and relieve homelessness**
2. **Prevent rough sleeping**
3. **Efficient use of temporary and supported accommodation**
4. **Working in partnership to address homelessness**

Actions

To achieve our four strategic priorities and address our key challenges, we will develop and implement a comprehensive action plan that has been informed through consultation with our partners and those with lived experience of homelessness.

All actions underpinning our strategic priorities will be monitored using a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time Bound) approach. Our Action Plan will identify:

- Expected outcomes and success measures.
- Timescales for the completion of specific actions.
- Lead officers and stakeholder partners to drive specific areas of work, and
- Budget implications.

We will review our Action Plan quarterly, with progress against our stated objectives measured through key performance indicators. These will be reported through the Councils corporate monitoring arrangements and shared with key partners and stakeholders via the Homelessness Forum.

Strategic Priority 1 – Prevent and Relieve Homelessness

To prevent and relieve homelessness we need to ensure that we have robust mechanisms in place to support those who are in need. Our staffing resources need to be sufficient and directed efficiently to deliver positive outcomes for our service users. Toolkits of support including financial assistance will be made available and appropriate to address presenting issues and prevent homelessness.

Our approach focuses on early intervention to support individuals at risk of losing their home either stay in their current home (providing it is suitable to do so), or by supporting a planned move to alternative, suitable long-term accommodation. Homelessness Prevention Officers will negotiate and advocate where possible to keep the individual housed in their existing accommodation. Alternatively, they may offer floating support, advice and financial assistance for re-housing to address the presenting issue.

How will we achieve Strategic Priority 1?

We will:

Ensure that support and advice is provided to individuals to help them sustain their current accommodation or to secure alternative accommodation at the earliest opportunity. For example, children in our care are offered bespoke interventions by a dedicated Homelessness Prevention Officer. We also have Officers who specialise in early engagement with those who have been granted asylum by the Home Office and are allowed to stay in the United Kingdom as well as providing tailored supported to those fleeing domestic violence.

- Ensure partner organisations understand and exercise their 'duty to refer' to enable and support early prevention work.
- Ensure through internal audit mechanisms that customer needs and pathways are regularly assessed and remain fit for purpose.
- Explore how technology can improve services, including the exploration of online application forms.
- Effectively monitor and bid for financial resources to support prevent and relieve homelessness.
- Maximise the use of available resources, including external support services to prevent homelessness.
- Implement a dedicated service for customers experiencing affordability issues in conjunction with the Council's Welfare Assistance Team.
- Deliver quarterly training sessions for those working with individuals at risk of homelessness promoting early identification and interventions from public sector partners, community groups and voluntary sector organisations.
- Explore improved ways of accessing the private rented market for customers. Provide enhanced information and support to enable individuals to undertake independent property searches.
- Implement an proactive, enhanced service for integration and resettlement cases to reduce the use of Emergency Accommodation.

How will we measure progress toward achieving our strategic priority 1 aims?

- The number of successful outcomes achieved in prevention cases will increase.
- The number of individuals placed into short-term supported accommodation who sustain their tenancies will increase. We will do this by working collaboratively with Registered Providers and private landlords to reduce the risk of tenancy breakdown and prevent evictions.
- An increase in the number of referrals from partner organisations under their 'duty to refer'.
- The number of cases that move from a Prevention to a Relief duty will decrease.

Strategic Priority 2 – Prevent Rough Sleeping

Rough sleeping represents the most dangerous and acute form of homelessness. It can have a severe impact on an individual's physical and mental health as well as their personal safety. Rough sleeping is rarely the first form of homelessness that people experience. Our aim is to reduce rough sleeping and ensure that any instance is rare and brief. To achieve this, we are committed to delivering a holistic approach to the assessment process and to service provision, ensuring that support meets the needs of the individual.

This strategy is supported by the Stockton-on-Tees Rough Sleeping Action Plan, aligned to MHCLG Rough Sleeping Initiative funding and outlines our plans for preventing rough sleeping.

How will we achieve strategic priority 2?

We will focus on 3 key areas:

Prevention - Stopping people sleeping rough for the first time by delivering a personalised holistic approach in collaboration with public and community partners.

Support - Supporting those currently sleeping rough to move off the streets by providing early intervention and targeted support and use our Rough Sleeper Outreach Support Officer to prevent evictions from supported housing.

We will ensure the early identification of repeat homelessness cases to determine whether wraparound support is required. In addition, we will explore the procurement of a 'Somewhere Safe to Stay – Sit Up Service', designed to provide immediate support to verified Rough Sleepers.

We will also continue to work in partnership to maintain our 'Buddy Service', delivered by our VCSE partner. Providing intensive support to vulnerable service users focusing on tenancy sustainment and social integration.

Recovery - Supporting those who have slept rough to prevent a return to the streets. This will be achieved through the provision of personalised recovery service, tailored to meet an individual's needs. A dedicated outreach support worker will co-ordinate support services that fall outside the remit of housing including drug and alcohol treatment services (with Change, Grow and Live) and work with social care and health professionals. A clear pathway will be established for progression through housing.

We will explore alternative assistance models which have been implemented in other geographical areas, such as 'Somewhere Safe to Stay', to determine if such models would be effective in Stockton-on-Tees.

How will we measure progress towards achieving our strategic priority 2 aims?

- The number of verified rough sleepers will decrease. Our target is a 5% reduction per year during the lifetime of the strategy. The number of verified rough sleepers should, therefore, decrease to 52 people by 2030.
- There will be an increase in the number of verified rough sleepers who are placed into accommodation within one week of verification.
- The use of Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme units will be periodically monitored and evaluated.

Strategic Priority 3 - Efficient Use of Temporary and Supported Accommodation

The use of temporary accommodation in the borough has increased, a trend that is replicated regionally and nationally. This rise is expected to continue, driven by external factors beyond the control of the local authority and is exacerbated by the growing demand for affordable accommodation, placing additional pressure on available resources.

To meet our statutory obligations and effectively support individuals and families, it is essential that we have the right balance of temporary accommodation and support.

How will we deliver strategic priority 3?

We will:

- Conduct a comprehensive options appraisal of our commissioned short-term supported housing, in preparation for the end of our 'Accommodation-based Housing-related Support Service for Homeless Families and Adults' contract. We must ensure that our temporary and supported accommodation provision meets the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness, delivers value for money and makes best use of our procured accommodation units.
- Break the cycle of repeat presentations for temporary accommodation. We will establish a complex needs criteria group to monitor the top 10 repeat presenters, address their individual circumstances contributing to repeat homelessness and develop a personal housing plan to address these issues. We will also work with partners to increase the number of 'move on' properties for those ready to transition to more stable accommodation.

How will we measure progress toward achieving our strategic priority 3 aims?

- By the number of people who have moved into long-term accommodation in a timely manner.
- The outcomes of the complex needs criteria group will be monitored periodically, with a reduction in repeat presentations to the service anticipated.
- The number of families and single people in emergency homeless accommodation will decrease.
- The overall cost of emergency accommodation (used in instances where commissioned temporary accommodation is exhausted) will decrease.

Strategic Priority 4 – Working in Partnership

To effectively address each individual case and deliver positive outcomes for our residents, it is essential that we identify and work with organisations and partners - across both the statutory and VCSE sector - who are the best placed to offer tailored support to those experiencing homelessness. We acknowledged that the Council may not always be the most appropriate agency to meet an individual's bespoke needs and experiences. Therefore maintaining strong partnerships with Registered Providers, commissioned services, colleagues within VCSE sector and other key partners is vital to ensuring those who experience homelessness are provided with the right support, in a timely manner, by the right people.

Maintaining positive partnerships will enhance our ability to deliver a personalised approach for individuals who present to the Homelessness Service. This person-centred support reduces the likelihood of individuals facing the risk of homelessness again in the future.

Furthermore, given the Government's ongoing commitment to devolving power to combined authorities, we will continue to work closely with the Tees Valley Combined Authority and our sub-regional local authority partners to achieve positive outcomes for our residents.

How will we deliver strategic priority 4?

We will:

- Hold quarterly meetings with partners to understand their challenges and identify any emerging issues or concerns.
- Establish a Homelessness Forum who will have a role in monitoring progress against this strategy.
- Continue to provide bespoke support via the Rough Sleeper and Repeat Homelessness Team, drawing on the expertise of internal and external partners.
- Emphasise the importance of staff members share workspaces with VCSE colleagues and ensure that this becomes standard practice within the team.

Additionally, priority three outline includes the re-commissioning of our temporary accommodation provision. We will ensure that we collaborate with our partners throughout the commissioning process, to enable the delivery of a provision which delivers positive outcomes for those placed into temporary accommodation.

How will we measure progress towards achieving our strategic priority 4 goals?

- Hold quarterly partnership meetings via the 'Homelessness Forum' and the 'Rough Sleeping Action Group', both are expected to improve outcomes for those experiencing homelessness.
- The Rough Sleeper and Repeat Homelessness Team will work to reduce repeat homelessness, leading to a decrease in repeat presentations to the service.
- The number of Prevention and Relief cases with a positive outcome should increase.

How will we deliver and monitor the strategy?

To ensure progress is being made against our strategic priorities, we will adopt robust monitoring arrangements through a detailed Action Plan. This will help us track progress and where appropriate take remedial action. Oversight will include regular engagement through the Homelessness Forum, which is to be established in accordance with Strategic Priority four.

Reviewing the strategy

Our Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy will be reviewed annually to ensure our Action Plan remains relevant and responsive to any new policy, legislation or funding opportunities that may impact on the delivery of services. In addition, our Action Plan will be reviewed quarterly to ensure that identified targets are on track and that timely action is taken if timescales are not being met.

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

18 SEPTEMBER 2025

REPORT OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

CABINET DECISION

**Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture - Lead Cabinet Member -
Councillor Nigel Cooke**

TEES VALLEY WASTE PROJECT - ENERGY REDUCTION FACILITY (ERF) UPDATE

SUMMARY

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

Cabinet has previously made the principal decisions to progress the joint waste facility as detailed in paragraphs 1 to 3 below and now a number of additional, ancillary legal agreements are required to progress the scheme to financial completion, to implement the project and ensure it's ongoing good governance.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)/DECISION(S)

External solicitors, DLA Piper LLP, were appointed by the lead authority, Hartlepool Borough Council, to advise and represent the Councils and have been advising on the necessary documentation to implement the project and ensure the project meets all of our requirements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To appoint the Assistant Director – Community Services and Transport, Craig Willows, 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. To authorise the council subscribing for shares in the SPV
3. To endorse the Council being the Shareholder in the SPV and to appoint the Section 151 Officer 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. To delegate authority 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. To delegate authority 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. To delegate authority 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.

DETAIL

1. 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 contains more details.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. The Cabinet Report of 17 March 2022 contains more details.

5. The Council's have selected a Preferred Bidder for the contract, Viridor, so the project is now moving towards financial completion.

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

7. The Council is 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 currently has to manage and monitor our current waste disposal contract.
8. Each of the 7 Councils will acquire one share each in the SPV which will entitle them to one vote each. It is proposed that the Council will be a Shareholder and therefore will require a Shareholder Representative to make decisions on behalf of the council in its role as shareholder in the company. SPV decisions will be made by the Management Team, appointed Board Director or Shareholder, the governance of which will be set out in the Shareholder's Agreement, Second Inter Authority Agreement and articles of association of the SPV.
9. In parallel with financial close being reached the First Inter Authority Agreement will end. The Waste Supply and Support Agreement and Shareholder Agreement will govern the management and monitoring of the contract.
10. Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council will 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 is proposed, along with a secondment agreement to second officers from Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council to the SPV.
11. Whilst Cabinet have approved the Council providing a Guarantee to the SPV with regard to the Project Agreement the SPV will also need to provide a similar guarantee to the contractor that the SPV will comply with its obligations under the Project Agreement.
12. Hartlepool Borough Council entered into an Option to lease the land from STDC (Teesworks) for the land on which the ERF will be built. Once the SPV has been formed and financial close reached Hartlepool will novate (transfer) the option agreement to the SPV.
13. A side deed between the SPV and South Tees Development Ltd, Teesworks and South Tees Development Corporation will set out how wider site issues for the remainder of the STDC estate will be dealt with, for example, abnormal loads, fly tipping and service charges.
14. The environmental deed, which will form part of the Lease of the site, will deal specifically with contamination and how it will be dealt with, by whom etc, should any contamination be identified.
15. Whilst Cabinet have approved the Council providing a Guarantee to the SPV with regard to the Lease from STDC, the SPV will also need to provide a similar guarantee to the contractor that the SPV will comply with its obligations under the sub-lease from the SPV to the contractor.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

16. All residents and businesses will benefit from a deliverable waste disposal strategy. The future ERF will deliver social value and investment into the local economy, employment and training opportunities and regeneration.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

17. There are no corporate parenting implications

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

18. This project will have capital and revenue implications for the authority as outlined in the Outline Business Case (OBC) report (approved Nov 2019 by Cabinet).
19. The financial implications of the LA SPV will be set out within the Business Plan. The treatment costs of the residual waste that shall be required to be paid to the Contractor and how these will be shared between the seven Councils will be defined within the Waste Supply and Support Agreement. The costs of the lease and the LA SPV will be allocated between the Councils in accordance with the Waste Supply and Support Agreement.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

20. The recommendations ensure that the Council is exercising all due diligence and protecting the Council's position in the Project. Legal advice has been received from DLA Piper LLP on behalf of all 7 councils that the agreements are necessary or advised.

RISK ASSESSMENT

21. The five Tees Valley Local Authorities along with Durham County Council and Newcastle City Council have agreed and implemented a robust risk management strategy to identify the key risk and ensure a consistent approach to both strategic and operation risk across the project.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

All wards will be affected by the provision of a new waste facility for the Borough

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Cabinet Report dated 16 July 2020

Cabinet Report dated 17 March 2022

Name of Contact Officer: Ged Morton

Post Title: Director of Corporate Services

Telephone No. 01642 527003

Email Address: ged.morton@stockton.gov.uk

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

DATE AUGUST 25

**REPORT OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

COUNCIL/CABINET DECISION

Children and Young People - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Clare Besford

STOCKTON-ON-TEES YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN

SUMMARY

Local authority partnerships have 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 sets out the youth justice partnerships responsibilities in producing a plan. It states that it is 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 are to be provided and funded, how they will operate, and what functions will be carried out.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth Justice Plans, in England only, must be signed off by the full Council in accordance with Regulation 4 of the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities England Regulations 2000).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation for full Council to sign off Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Plan for 2025/26.

DETAIL

1. The Youth Justice Plan reports on our vision, strategy, governance, leadership and partnership arrangements. It reflects and builds upon our good performance against key national performance measures. It also documents key themes around child first principles, evidence-based practice, prevention and diversion and our work with victims.

BACKGROUND

2. The Youth Justice Plan was produced after consultation with the partnership which includes the Police, Probation, Health and Education.
3. The Plan builds upon the work we have done throughout 24/25. The document outlines six key strategic objective for the forthcoming year. These are:

- 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.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

4. The primary aim of a youth justice plan is to prevent offending and re-offending by children by working with them, their parents and carers. Youth Justice Teams support victims of crime and work to contribute to keeping communities safe.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

5. There are no direct corporate parenting implications for the Council arising from the recommendations.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6. There are no direct financial implications for the Council arising from the recommendations.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7. There are no direct legal implications for the Council arising from the recommendations.

RISK ASSESSMENT

8. The Youth Justice Plan is overseen by the Youth Justice Board and Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Management Board. Strong partnership arrangements are in place to monitor progress against our strategic objectives.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

9. None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

10. Stockton-On-Tees Youth Justice Plan 2025/26

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Youth Justice Plan Stockton-on-Tees

2025-2026



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Introduction, Vision, and Strategy



Welcome to the Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Plan for 2025-26. The plan looks back on our achievements to date and ongoing challenges. The plan will set out our ambitious priorities for the forthcoming year. This plan has been developed and agreed by the Youth Justice Partnership.

The Youth Justice Management Board are committed to our children and the principles of Child First practice. Across the partnership we have the ambition of wanting our children to thrive and achieve the best outcomes they can. We aspire to promote positive outcomes, reduce crime, and make our community safer.

As a Management Board we continue to be inspired by the Youth Justice Team (YJT) and the service they deliver. The session on participation helped the Board understand the lived experience of the children the team work with. In the last 12 months the Management Board have also received presentations on the speech and language work the team are doing with children and their families and the excellent work they are

doing in engaging victims in a restorative process.

We recognise we need to continue with our work around reducing serious youth violence and school exclusions. We also have work to do around reducing our custody numbers as they remain too high.

In 2024-25, the YJT relocated to sit within Early Help, Youth Justice and Youth support in Children's Services to refocus efforts to work with children and families at the earliest opportunity to prevent escalation into statutory services. The move to our central base at Dunedin House has allowed the YJT to form even closer links with our Social Work teams and Care Leaver Service.

These are exciting times for Stockton-On-Tees Children Services as we start to shape our services in response to the Families First Partnership Programme. We have also embarked on embedding a systemic model of practice across all teams and this fits well with Child First and trauma informed principles.

Majella McCarthy, Chair of Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Management Board & Director of Children's Services

Local Context

Stockton-on-Tees is a diverse area of six towns covering mainly urban areas, with some rural villages. Its population is around 200,000 and growing. A total of 8% of the population are from a black or other minority ethnic groups. The population of 10–17-year-olds is just over 20,000.

There are areas of great affluence alongside some of the most deprived in England, with some significant differences around life and health outcomes. We know that socio-economic factors profoundly influence the lives and available opportunities for children. Many of the children who come into the justice system are from our most deprived communities.

Over the last ten years there has been a significant reduction in the number of children in the justice system. The current profile holds a small group of children who are considered to have complex needs, coupled with their experience of trauma, which renders them vulnerable to criminal exploitation. Children in the justice system are predominantly male and white British. A substantial number of children in the justice system are also known to Children Services.

Stockton-on-Tees YJT are currently working with an equal number of children subject to Court Orders and Out-Of-Court Disposals (OOCd). The volume of statutory work is consistent with high levels of deprivation in the area and children being vulnerable to exploitation. Violence against the person is the most common offence for both statutory and OOCd work. We have recently seen an increase in driving related offences. Referral Orders continue to be the most common disposal for Court Orders while Triage is most used for OOCd.

Governance, Leadership and Partnership Arrangements

Youth Justice Management Board

The Management Board delivers strategic direction and coordinates the provision of local services. There is a clear focus on holding those functions, and the wider youth justice partnership to account for performance at both an operational and strategic level.

The membership and terms of reference for the Management Board were reviewed and refreshed in 2024 to ensure its continued effectiveness and compliance with 'Youth Justice Service Governance and Leadership, December 2021'. The main objectives of the Board are:

1. To ensure the preparation and implementation of the annual Youth Justice Plan; to consider and act upon feedback from the Youth Justice Board (YJB).
2. To determine how the Youth Justice Team is to be composed and funded, how it is to operate and what functions it is to carry out.
3. To agree measurable objectives linked to key performance indicators as part of the youth justice plan and evaluate service delivery to improve understanding of 'what works' in preventing offending and reoffending, including consideration of thematic inspections.
4. To influence other strategies and programmes from a youth offending perspective.
5. To agree annual funding arrangements and ensure the effective use of resource. To monitor quarterly financial position statements. To seek opportunities to gain additional resources which add value to core funding.
6. To oversee the appointment and designation of the Head of Service.

The Board is chaired by the Director of Children's Services. Board membership is comprised of representatives from statutory partners including the Local Authority; Police Service; Probation Service and the Integrated Health Board; and from local partners: the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), voluntary and community sector: and the courts. Management Board attendance throughout the last year has been good.

The Board meets quarterly as well as monitoring youth justice outcomes, the Board takes account of emerging trends, policy directives, legislation, research, and inspections. Information on compliance with the conditions of Youth Justice Board grant funding is overseen through the review of performance reports and quality assurance activity.

Location

The YJT is located in our Early Help, Youth Justice and Youth Support division within Children's Services.

The YJT sit alongside Family Hubs, Family Support Team, Family Group Conferencing, Therapeutic Services and Youth Support. There are two Services Leads one for Early Help and the other for Youth Justice and Youth Support.

The team are centrally located within the same building as Early Help and Statutory Teams, which provides opportunity for daily discussions where there is active Social Care involvement.

The Youth Justice Head of Service role is delivered by the Head of Service for Early Help, Youth Justice and Youth Support, with line management by the Assistant Director for Early Help, Safeguarding and Children in Our Care.

Resources and Value for Money

Resourcing for youth justice services comes from the Youth Justice Board and the local partnership. Youth justice functions are compliant with the minimum staffing requirements set out in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and a structure chart is presented on page 26.

A 100% of the youth justice grant is allocated to staffing costs within the YJT, accounting for over half of the employee costs for practitioners delivering statutory youth justice work in the courts, community and custody. The costs of seconded staff are met by their employing agencies. There is robust supervision and management oversight of case managers and other YJ staff. A management database is used to extract and track performance data.

The YJT has a diverse workforce comprising staff on substantive permanent and temporary contracts and community volunteers.

We are committed to delivering services that represent value for money. A significant amount of time has been spent on understanding the 'value' of services that are delivered, in terms of cost, outcomes and savings created through prevention and 'invest to save' approaches.

We will be delivering a range of services in partnership with others, to avoid duplication and to draw upon the skills and expertise of partners to maximise use of resources and expertise.



Partnership Arrangements

Youth justice services in Stockton-on-Tees have developed a range of strategic and operational linkages; outlined below:



The range of partners will be further expanded in the coming year as we consolidate arrangements to embed our Harm Outside the Home Team and jointly tackle and respond to serious youth violence across the Borough.

Most statutory youth justice interventions are delivered 'in house' or in partnership with key stakeholders. Our commissioned arrangement for speech, language, and communication services with Tees, Esk, Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust will continue.

Joint working arrangements with the Office of Police Crime and Commissioner (OPCC) funded Liaison and Diversion Service and Custody Navigators to support children in the police station are continuing; these are significant not only to ensure that children are properly supported but also to ensure a presence during those critical 'reachable moments'.

There is a close working relationship between the YJT and Children's Social Care for those deemed to be a Child in Need, Child in our Care and Care Leavers. Working protocols are in place. The reduction of criminalisation and offending by Children in our Care are corporate priorities and is well understood and embedded in local decision making by our partners in Police, Crown Prosecution Service, and the Courts.

Multi-agency pathways have been developed to support the 'Prevent' and Modern-Day Slavery legislation. The YJT is also an integral part of Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). When a multi-agency approach is required to protect people from serious harm, information sharing agreements ensure information is available to support holistic assessments and planning for young people. All information is managed sensitively in accordance with Data Protection principles.

Update on the previous year

Help children stay out of the criminal justice system.

During 2024/25 we firmly established our 'Child First' bespoke OOCN panels. We invite professionals who have more knowledge from working with the child to contribute to the discussion and decision making. In the last year, the panel has diverted over 100 children away from the criminal justice system. We have also embedded the YJB Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool (PDAT) into practice and it is used for all OOCN and Turnaround.

The OPCC have agreed to provide a continuation of funding for Triage disposals and interventions to children for 2025/26. This is an essential component in our work as in the last 12 months we have delivered 112 OOCN. Triage continues to be our most widely used OOCN (79), followed by Outcome 22 (18) and Restorative Interventions (13). Although we have diverted significant numbers of children our FTE rate has increased from 125 to 173. This has been driven by children committing high gravity offences and charged straight to court.

The Ministry of Justice gave our Turnaround programme a target of delivering successful interventions to 97 children by March 2025. We have dedicated staff committed to the programme and subsequently we were able to achieve this goal by working with 98 children. Turnaround has provided a range of interventions which have included family work, positive activities, and support with Education, Training and Employment (ETE).

Reduce the use of custody and prioritise effective resettlement.

Our custody rate has continued to remain high over the last 12 months. It is currently at 0.28 which equates to six custodial sentences. This relates to four children of whom two received two terms of imprisonment. The main contributory factor behind these rates has been serious youth violence, child exploitation and the influence of Organised Crime Groups across the Borough. We have worked hard to keep our custody rates at a minimum and this was recognised during our YJB National Standards validation visit in January 2024. The YJT have worked closely with YJB Northeast Head of Oversight and reviewed the Pre-Sentencing Report's (PSR's) written where the children received custodial sentences. This was an exercise proposed at the Management Board meeting in January 2025. The review found that although all reports were strong, it was difficult to say if the custodial sentence could have been avoided. Nevertheless, there was some learning for the YJT. The team need to ensure PSR's have a consistent child focus lens, document the emotional and psychological impact of a custodial sentence and ensure it is balanced and accounts for positive aspects of the child's life, regardless of how small.

At the point of sentence, we hold bi-monthly resettlement meetings to ensure support is available on release. All children are subject to a range of licence conditions which include where appropriate electronic tags with trial monitoring. Our CAMHS, Speech And Language Team (SALT), Education To Employment (ETE) and support workers have been involved to ensure each child has consistent and individual support throughout the whole sentence. All

children have been released into suitable accommodation; however, we have had challenges in motivating the children towards appropriate ETE.

To reduce reoffending

We endeavour to ensure all children have a dedicated worker. Children who are receiving a Turnaround intervention will continue to have the same worker if they are charged with any offence. We have continued to review and develop our interventions. We have purchased two Virtual Reality Headsets and have extended learning packages for knife crime, gangs, and peer influences. The feedback from the children about these focused interventions has been very positive. In the last year we have also started a girl's group which focused on healthy relationships, self-esteem and keeping safe. Our interventions are under continuous review. Across Early Help, Youth Justice and Youth Support and Children's Social Care we have brought staff together to develop a range of interventions which incorporate all age ranges, styles and learning needs. The initial focus is on knife crime, peer influences and online safety, by bringing together a range of experts across all services, we in turn hope to produce innovative and effective interventions that resonate with children and reduce the risk of future offending. We have also strengthened our transition process and have undertaken a joint development session with our local Probation team, ensuring that young adult's transition seamlessly into the service.

We have continued to employ an ETE Worker to ensure children have intensive support to secure and engage them within appropriate ETE opportunities. We have a comprehensive health offer, with SALT and CAMHS workers, they have monthly health hub meetings where we can coordinate interventions. The SALT worker has worked with 41 children in a six-month period from April – September 24. All the children received comprehensive assessment along with at least two intervention sessions. We have reconfigured our trauma informed pathway and Tees Esk Wear Valley NHS Trust provide specialist workers that offer weekly consultations to staff on children with complex needs.

Strengthen our responses to Serious Youth Violence and Child Exploitation

The Youth Justice Management Board have advanced and shaped our multi-agency response to Serious Youth Violence. Nine partners completed the Joint Targeted Area Inspection Self-Assessment. This documented the wide range of work across the partnership and identified some gaps in provision. Consequently, we have worked in partnership with public health to complete a Rapid Needs Assessment which will establish local needs and identify best practice. The Management Board following publication of the needs assessment will meet in July 2025 to identify our priorities and to formulate a co-produced Serious Youth Violence Strategy. We have continued to work closely with Cleveland Unit for Reduction Violence (CURV) as they received further funding for the Custody Navigators scheme at Middlesbrough Custody Suite, where Children from Stockton-On-Tees are taken when arrested. This has ensured children have support at the earliest opportunity and trained staff can facilitate support. Research by Crest Advisory in November 2024 has indicated a promising impact the scheme has had on

first time attendees at the Police Station. We work closely with youth services across Stockton and are working with them to apply for funding from CURVE Knife Crime Action Fund so they can raise awareness amongst children of the consequences of carrying a knife, support families to strengthen relationships and improve communication. Our Turnaround Programme has continued to work with those children who have been arrested for violent offences but who have not been formally charged. Again, this early intervention response will have benefits of steering children away from becoming involved in serious youth violence.

To reduce the number of School Exclusions

We have worked closely with our colleagues in education to reduce the number of school exclusions. The Assistant Director of Education delivered a presentation to the Management Board in July 2024. He was able to provide an overview of the current work and initiatives. These include an attendance strategy, two risk of exclusions projects (St Michaels and Northfields), Pre-Exclusion Panels, governor training, Department for Education change programme and fair access policy. The YJT have also supported children to remain in education. This area of work remains a challenge as the above work has only slightly reduced the level of school exclusions. We acknowledge that there is further work to be done in this area.

To refresh our practice in our victim work and restorative practice.

Over the last 12 months we have refreshed our practice regarding victim work and restorative justice. We have appointed a Youth Justice Coordinator and have built some capacity with two support workers, who have also undertaken victim work. We recently refreshed our victim policy and have developed an action plan where we will continue to develop our practice in relation to a dedicated victim leaflet, victim safety plans and the creation of an audit tool for victim work. We are proud of the progress we have made in this area and details of our activity are documented in the restorative approaches and victims' section of this plan.

To Develop a Participation Model of Practice

The YJT created a participation group in June 2024, and they meet on a bi-monthly basis. The group has collated children's experiences of exploitation. We have developed a photography project so children can tell their stories in an innovative and creative way. We have gathered children's feedback about the resources they would like us to purchase for our child friendly space – the No limits Hub. Consequently, we are in the process of developing music, art, and podcast studios, to engage with children in a more creative and interest driven way.

We also delivered a participation workshop to the Management Board in July 2024, where a child attended and talked about his experience at Wetherby Young Offenders Institute. We are in the process of creating a 'mock' video of a Referral Order panel so this can be shared with children and families, so they know what to expect. We feel we still have work to do in this area and aim to build a participation group of children where we can regularly consult with them to

Performance over the last year.

First Time Entrants (FTE's)

The rate of FTE's has increased in the last year. The latest published YJB data currently has our rate at 173 and this is an increase in the last year from 125. The actual numbers of children who have become FTE's is 37 compared to 26 previously. Although our OOC Panel has contained this number (only two children received Youth Cautions) we have had 31 children who have been sentenced to Court Orders for high gravity offences. The other four children were sentenced at Court to either a Conditional Discharge or Compensation Order.

Although the rate has increased, we are lower than the Region of 186 and Cleveland PCC area of 218. However, we are higher than Family 156 and England and Wales 148.

Reoffending Rate

The latest reoffending rate is 47.4% which is a small increase on the previous year of 44.4%. The current rate is higher than other comparisons of the Region 38.9%, Cleveland PCC area 43.6%, Family 29.2% and England and Wales 31.6%. Our reoffending rate has fluctuated as in the period January - March 23 the rate was 41.7%. The YJB Youth Justice Statistics 2023/24 Insight Report (May 2025) documents that nationally there has been a rise in reoffending rates for the second consecutive year.

The current cohorts consist of 19 children, where nine reoffended. This is compared to last year of a cohort of 12, where five reoffended.

Reoffences/Reoffender

The current rate of reoffences/reoffender is 3.3 which is lower than the rate 12 months ago of 3.75. The latest rate is lower than all other comparisons. The rate for the Region 3.79 Cleveland PCC area 4.38, Family 4.75 and England and Wales 4.25. The reoffences/reoffender Rate is from nine reoffenders who committed a further 30 offences.

Use of Custody

The latest use of custody rate is 0.28, this is the same as the previous year. Our rate is higher than all other measures. The rate for the is region 0.16, Cleveland PCC 0.27, family 0.07 and England and Wales 0.10. The custody rate comes from six custodial sentences being given in the past year. All sentences were for violent offences, with two children being sentenced to two custodial sentences during this period.

Risks and Issues

Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice partnership continues to function in an ever-evolving landscape with the streamlining of services and pressures on resources.

It is evident the children in the youth justice system in Stockton remain some of the most vulnerable in our communities, particularly those in custody with links to exploitation. Reoffending behaviour by children in Stockton of a reducing cohort remains a challenge both in Stockton and nationally.

Serious Youth Violence continues to be a challenge in Stockton along with school exclusions. Our plan for 2025/26 documents how we are planning to address these issues.

The YJB grant allows us to maintain a comprehensive and effective service to the children we work with. We need to ensure we have sufficient resources in place to meet demand and expectations. This needs to be kept under constant review. Any reduction in the YJB grant would have serious implications. There are also risks with the Ministry of Justice Turnaround grant and OPCC Triage funding. Both funding streams are only for 2025/26 and if these do not continue beyond this period, we would need to redesign the services we offer.

The YJT moved to Pathways our new case management system in September 2024. We have worked hard to ensure any disruption is kept to a minimum. However, there are ongoing risks about our ability to fulfil our data reporting. Our provider NEC will be providing an upgrade in August 2025, and this should facilitate our KPI reporting by embedding the PDAT into the case management system.

The YJT along with many other teams from across Stockton-On-Tees Borough Council moved into Dunedin House (a big open office environment) in August 2025. The team has settled into this environment and have embraced co-location work and the benefits this brings. Last year we were concerned about not having a centralised venue for appointments with children and families. This was resolved in March 2025 when we were able to access the No Limits Hub in Stockton town centre.

Plans for the forthcoming year

Child First

The Child Focus¹ approach has 4 tenets, which are summarised as:

As children

Prioritise the best interests of children and recognising their particular needs, capacities, rights and potential. All work is child-focused, developmentally informed, acknowledges structural barriers and meets responsibilities towards children.



Building pro-social identity

Promote children's individual strengths and capacities to develop their pro-social identity for sustainable desistance, leading to safer communities and fewer victims. All work is constructive and future-focused, built on supportive relationships that empower children to fulfil their potential and make positive contributions to society.

Collaborating with children

Encourage children's active participation, engagement and wider social inclusion. All work is a meaningful collaboration with children and their carers.

Diverting from stigma

Promote a childhood removed from the justice system, using pre-emptive prevention, diversion and minimal intervention. All work minimises criminogenic stigma from contact with the system.

The Child First approach means that all staff consistently refer to our cohort as children and not young people. This is more effective when gaining access to appropriate services. We talk to children in a positive way about their strengths and ability for positive change.

We have promoted diversion throughout the team and partners and consequently have seen a significant number of children been dealt with by way of OOC. We aspire to avoid criminalising children unnecessarily. We adopted the PDAT assessment at an early stage, this has promoted better planning and use of language. We consistently talk about behaviours rather than offences, and safety for others rather than risk to others. The YJT strives to promote children with a pro-social identity.

In the past year we have collaborated with children and listened to their voices about experiences of the criminal justice system, purchased fidget tools and VR headsets. Intervention plans are more child friendly using language children understand and relate too.

We have continued to build a strong partnership approach to our work so we can continue to develop personalised child focus work. Our support workers have been creative in how they engage with children and have assisted children to attend music studios, bike projects and photography projects. We have speech, language and communication, health and education and training workers in place along with support workers who can work with children to develop inclusion, positive relations, interests, and activities.

We have started to use QR codes to make it easier for children and families to provide feedback. Children have consequently provided feedback about our Turnaround Programme and have helped to design resources for our children's space the 'No Limits Hub.'

We are committed to ensuring that children and their families have a voice; that they have an influence on their individual intervention programmes and in broader approaches to service delivery and developments. We aspire to deliver motivational, respectful, and strength-based approaches to promote desistance from crime.

Resources and services

Regular financial reports are presented to the YJ Management Board with recommendations for the board to discuss and agree. The income and projected expenditure represent finance estimates based upon the YJT structure, agreed funding and service initiative from a national and local level. As in previous years, staff costs will continue to constitute most of the expenditure. All monies carried forward in reserve are earmarked for planned Youth Justice business, and all future spend of the reserve would be agreed by the board.

There is currently no requirement for Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Service to contribute to remand costs, but this may change if the numbers increase.

We use 100% of our grant, partner contributions and available resources to deliver these services and we believe they produce improved benefits and outcomes, and our performance will be improved in 2025–26 by understanding and working with the diverse communities in Stockton. This will be delivered with a joined-up problem-solving approach, focusing on our response and long-term support, using a consistent approach in working with our most vulnerable, complex, and high-risk children and enhancing our offer for First-Time Entrants.

The table on page 26 represents the closing financial position for 2025-26. The budget has seen a slight increase in the YJB grant, due to an uplift in 2025.

The Ministry of Justice Turnaround programme financial profile will be presented as a separate report in the 2025-26 financial year. We have continued to receive payment in kind for Police, Probation and Health workers. The Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner has committed further funding for our Triage programme for 2025/26.

Workforce Development

We updated our workforce development policy in November 2025 to ensure all YJT employees and seconded workers have sufficient skills to enable them to carry out their job effectively. Staff receive monthly supervision and yearly appraisal along with completing a range of mandatory training. All YJT in 2024-25 staff have received training on the YJB PDAT, Virtual Reality headset training, Harm Outside the Home, SALT, and Harmful Sexual Behaviour. The YJT has a monthly Effective Practice session with all staff. The sessions are designed to develop knowledge and skills. In 2024-25 we completed work on Court Skills, GPS tagging, Resources, and a Participation workshop. Our CAMHS worker has also continued to undertake reflective practice sessions with staff.

In the last year we worked in partnership with Family Action to recruit and train an additional three Referral Order volunteers. Consequently, we have a total of 10 panel members. Referral Order panel member meetings take place on a quarterly basis and an element of training is provided during these sessions. Panel members are also offered two 1:1 sessions each year. They also have access to Stockton Borough council training. We have continued to support our two apprentices, and one has found work in Children's Social Care.

In the last year we have had several new members of staff joining the team. All staff have received our two-week induction programme which includes meetings, training, and shadowing opportunities. Our training plan for 2025-26 covers such areas as systemic practice, transitions to probation and masterclasses in effective case management.

Evidence-based practice and innovation

Stockton-on-Tees YJT always seek to improve practice to ensure we achieve the best possible outcomes for children and families. Consequently, we continually work towards improving the services we provide and extend our offer based on best and evidence-based practice. We have built upon good practice over many years and desistance theory is embedded into our way of working. We ensure children have consistency of case managers so we can form relationships with the children and families we work with. We use trauma informed practice along with a child first mindset and restorative approach to engage children and families.

Over the last year we have had some excellent examples of good practice. These include a child's mother becoming a referral order panel member. A child created a lasting memorial for a family member and a child who won the Cleveland OPCC Christmas Card Competition. The participants of our Girls group provided excellent feedback. Our partnership approach/offer is an example of our current good practice. We have Police, Probation, ETE, SALT and CAMHS workers all in place and we are responsive to children's needs and is evident throughout our work with children.

Evaluation

During the last year we have undertaken an audit of 20 closed Turnaround cases. The audit found proactive engagement, a high level of contact and only a small number of children had gone on to commit an offence. However, there were also some areas of development where the screening tool and planning document we were using was not fit for purpose and staff needed to focus work on providing children with skills to manage difficult situations more effectively. Consequently, we introduced the use of the YJB PDAT for all Turnaround cases. We also ensured workers were encouraged to deliver programmes, for example, work on peer influences. Early Help, Youth Justice and Youth Support service area undertake a range of audits which include dip sampling, collaborative, and direct observations. Youth Justice cases are included in this work where learning is disseminated and acted upon.

Priorities for the coming year

1. Help children stay out of the criminal justice system.

We will:

- Continue to promote diversion principles at our OOC panels and use of Triage, Outcome 22, and Restorative Interventions.
- Continue to provide comprehensive interventions for children identified through our Turnaround programme.
- Continue to deliver Triage services in partnership with the Office Police Crime Commissioner.
- Co-ordinate quarterly meetings with the Police to review all cases where children became First-Time Entrants.
- Develop an action plan from the above to address any themes/patterns which emerge from these meetings.
- Work closely with Youth Support Team to ensure we identify children who may come into contact with the criminal justice system.

2. To reduce reoffending.

We will:

- To develop more modern programmes in relation to driving offences.
- Facilitate staff workshops on social skills training.
- Continue to develop our transition offer with Probation.
- Continue to focus on health needs with all children assessed for SALT, CAMHS and ETE needs.
- Continue to provide a comprehensive offer to the youth justice cohort regarding sports and physical activities.

3. Reduce the use of custody and prioritise effective resettlement.

We will:

- Continue to hold a pre-sentence meeting in all possible custody cases to ensure comprehensive Community Sentences are recommended to court. To ensure all reports are produced with a 'child first' lens emphasizing the child's difficulties and achievements.
- Propose appropriate Intensive Supervision and Surveillance with trial monitoring as this will promote confidence to the Court that children can be managed safely in the community.
- All resettlement cases will be discussed at Management Board meetings to ensure any gaps in provision are known and escalated to Board members whose seniority can make key decisions.
- Ensure early planning is in place for those children leaving custody. This will be monitored by monthly resettlement meetings.
- In appropriate cases liaise with Courts and defence solicitors to facilitate one sentencing exercise for children having multiple offences going through court.

4. Continue to Strengthen our responses to Serious Youth Violence and Child Exploitation.

We will:

- Identify children through the HOTH screening process to ensure they receive the appropriate level of support.
- Head of Service to sit on the Stockton Safer Partnership meetings.
- To continue to work closely with our Adolescent Social Work Team to develop positive pathways for children to steer them away from Serious Youth Violence and Child Exploitation.
- The YJ Management Board to develop our Serious Youth Violence strategy on completion of the Rapid Needs assessment.
- Work in partnership with CURV to develop Young futures Prevention Partnership panels.
- Work in partnership with Youth United Stockton Alliance to see funding opportunities to address serious youth violence for example, CURV Knife Crime action programme.
- To identify children at risk of serious youth violence at the earliest opportunity through our work with Custody Navigators and Turnaround Programmes and provide them with support.

5. To Focus on Reducing the number of school exclusions, improving school attendance, and providing opportunities for post 16 children.

We will:

- To continue to monitor school exclusion across the youth justice cohort.
- To work with education leaders to increase the capacity of alternative educational provision.
- To work with senior education leaders on strategy to increase school attendance.
- To work with Tees Valley Youth Trailblazer initiative to identify NEET children to provide support and work experience opportunities.
- Work with UK Youth to develop summer jobs project.

- Utilise Youth Justice child focused ETE meetings to raise concerns and find solutions around school attendance and exclusions.

6. To Continue to develop our Intervention programmes and our child friendly space.

We will:

- Develop our No Limits Hub and continue to work with our children to design the space.
- To explore a venue that would facilitate children's interest and creativity (arts, craft, and upcycling).
- Develop a range of resources on knife crime, peer influences and online safety.
- To deliver VR headset interventions.

National priority areas

Children from groups which are over-represented.

It is paramount Stockton-On-Tees YJT are aware of issues of disproportionality and take appropriate action. It is recognised that nationally children from some ethnic minority groups are more likely to be criminalized. We have continued to provide the Management Board with quarterly reports which document the ethnicity and diversity of the youth justice cohort.

The report compares information to the latest census data (2021) where Stockton's population in terms of ethnicity is 92% White, 4.6% Asian, 3.3% Other. Our current caseload consists of 95% white compared to 93% the previous year, which suggests a small over representation of this group. Although the numbers are relatively small, we are committed to continued scrutiny and analysis of data. We are not complacent about children facing discrimination and staff will use their professional curiosity to explore children's experience of racism. The YJB Ethnic Disparity tool 2025 has documented over representation is not statistically significant in Stockton. It does however state it is white children who are most likely to commit a serious offence and most likely to be sentenced at court rather than receive youth cautions or youth conditional cautions. In terms of gender the current caseload consists of 88% male and 13% female. This concurs with the national average of 85% male and 15% female. We also have a high percentage of children who are CIOC, Child Protection, Child in Need or Early Help. Over the last year this has ranged from 40-50% of children the YJT are working with.

Prevention

Our prevention offer mainly comes from our Youth Support Team. The team are responsible for direct work with children where there are risks or vulnerabilities. They also provide a dedicated response to children who go missing from home. Youth Support deliver interventions to prevent or reduce concerning behaviours that have been identified within the home or community, building social and emotional resilience. These are key parts of our work to prevent offending, safeguard children, identify risks and prevent further missing episodes.

All engagement with the Youth Support Team is voluntary and they prioritise face-to-face contact and direct work, taking full opportunity of any reachable moments presented between them and the child. All direct work is aimed to be individual to each child's needs, innovative and using evidence-based practice tools, which underpins our good practice and quality assurance framework.

Youth Support aims to reduce the need for statutory involvement by responding to the early indicators of concern and to prevent the need for social care intervention. Both YJT and Youth Support have close links with SBC Community Safety team who can identify children who are displaying anti-social behaviour in the community.

Diversion

Stockton-on-Tees YJT is committed to a diversionary approach in our work. We believe we should avoid unnecessary criminalisation of children and deal with them at the lowest possible level. The YJT are keen to ensure where there is a linked offence children receive an alternative outcome that does not result in a criminal record, avoids escalation into the formal youth justice system and associated stigmatisation. Our OOC framework has a range of disposals (Restorative Interventions, Outcome 22, Triage and Triage 2) that avoid children having a criminal record so we can, through assessment and intervention, help them form/maintain a pro-social identity. In the last 12 months we have had 112 children subject to one of the above and all children have been provided with an intervention. Only two children out of the 112 received either a Youth Caution or Youth Conditional Caution and became FTE's. This is compared to 13 out of 116 OOC the previous year. We have therefore embedded our diversionary principles into practice.

Education

Access to opportunities for ETE for the youth justice cohort is fundamental for their prospects. The YJT have developed individual child focused meetings to consider children who are not fulfilling their potential. Colleagues from Careers Services, SEND and Education Improvement attend these meetings. Many children have low self-esteem, poor educational attainment, low attendance and motivation, SALT and SEND needs. The YJT has had a dedicated ETE worker in place since October 2023 to provide specialist advice and support. Our SALT worker has undertaken numerous assessments on children and has completed reports giving clear advice to parents and schools/training providers about how best to communicate with the child and provide strategies to engage them in their education / training. All YJT staff now have access to Stockton's Education department database EYES, and this provides 'live' information on children's schools, attendance, and educational needs. Our current ETE performance is 71%. There is, however, a contrast between school age and post 16 of 86% to 43%. It is acknowledged our post 16 ETE rates remain a significant challenge. Our ETE worker continues to explore opportunities with local providers such as NACRO and Princess Trust. We have also identified several children who have applied for the summer jobs programme through UK Youth.

Restorative approaches and victims

The YJT has a dedicated Youth Justice Coordinator role, and this post has responsibility for restorative justice and victim intervention. Most victims are contacted and an offer of involvement in a restorative process is initiated. This offer includes direct mediation, ensuring the voice of the victim is heard, direct/indirect reparation and letters of apology/explanation. During the last year we have made progress in gaining good victim information. From July 2024 to March 2025, we have had 113 victim referrals. A total of 66 victims shared their views and experiences of crime. It is therefore positive 58% of victims contacted engaged in the process and their views were heard. A total of 40 victims have had updates on the child's engagement with the YJT. Another 12 victims have been provided with specialist support, for example, VCAS, domestic violence or mental health. The Youth Justice Coordinator in the last six months has undertaken 49 victim awareness sessions with 24 children. This has allowed the

victim's experience to be incorporated into this work. We have also built capacity as two support workers can now undertake victim and restorative work.

We have also developed a portfolio of reparation projects, for example, Family Hub and allotment projects. We have also focused on more themed projects such as white ribbon day to raise awareness about ending violence towards women and girls and VE celebrations.

Serious violence and exploitation

The link between the exploitation of children and serious organised crime gangs and the connections with the supply of drugs and serious violence is well understood in Stockton, as is the intrafamilial harm whereby family members of children are involved in OCG and serious violence. It was evident the partnership in Stockton continues to develop a coordinated response to criminal exploitation and youth violence. We have robust information sharing processes and forums in place across the partnership. Stockton has responded to concerns by strengthening its response and building on its Harm Outside the Home (HOTH) with a dedicated service area with the creation of the Adolescent Team in December 2023.

The Adolescent and HOTH teams sit in Children's Social Care. The Adolescent Team has at its core the safeguarding of children who are being exploited or at risk of exploitation. They will work with children from the age of 10-18 years of age who are likely to suffer harm from exploitation, although this will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. The Service can work with children for as long as necessary or whilst there is consent, with regular Child Protection or Child in Need reviews taking place between 4-6 weeks (depending on the risk) to assess the effectiveness of the plan. The Adolescent Team and YJT have formed close working arrangements and will co-ordinate appointments and interventions for children at risk.

We continue to work in close partnership with Police, Health, Community Safety, Police Custody Navigators, health navigator from hospitals, Virtual School, and Youth Support (who co-ordinate our response to children Missing From Home).

In bringing together the knowledge, expertise and resources of all partners, the team can share information swiftly, create a full picture of risk and need and provide a creative and effective response that is always guided by the needs and wishes of the individual child, young person, and their family. A morning meeting is held each day where nominated staff from the Police, Adolescent Team, HOTH, YJT and Youth Support discuss 'live' cases, share information and coordinate a multi-agency response.

This is underpinned by our core principles which are: youth voice and experience, development and transitions in their lives, intervene early and help prevent further harm, intervention, disruption and information sharing and data analysis.

The HOTH arrangements provide assessment and risk management responses to those persons and locations where exploitation harm is present for children. Persons and locations of concern are managed in partnership through the Community Safety led Joint Action Group and Police led MARSOC management of which YJT are partners. As such, the partnership is

collectively responsive to support disruption of the contextual risks for children at risk of exploitation harm. In addition, there is the oversight of National Referral Mechanism (NRM) submissions through the Tees Strategic Exploitation Group (TSEG), as YJT work in partnership with HOTH and Adolescent Team to ensure appropriate referrals are made, and information is shared to support identification of children at risk of Modern Slavery and Trafficking.

The YJS partnership facilitates the seamless transfer of information on risk and vulnerabilities across a range of forums which include, the strategic HOTH Meetings, Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). We continue to work closely with CURV, and the funded custody navigators scheme provides a holistic approach in engaging and intervening with children at the earliest opportunity.

We recognise serious youth violence and exploitation continues to be a significant challenge for Stockton. The YJB data on serious violence published in April 2025 showed an increase in the rate of serious youth violence in the year ending December 2024 with 14 offences compared to the previous year of 12. Stockton's rate of 6.6 is higher than other comparisons, for example, Northeast 4.8 and England and Wales 6.2.

Detention in police custody

We have established arrangements in place for children detained in custody. Youth Support Team provides an Appropriate Adult (AA) service during office hours 9 -5 and the Emergency Duty Team provide an after-hours service. All staff undertaking AA work have been PACE trained. Staff will work with the Police to facilitate that a parent/carer will attend in the first instance. If this is not possible, we will act as AA and ensure the child understands the process and any interview is conducted fairly. Furthermore, we will provide updates to parents/carers and relevant professionals.

Cleveland Youth Justice Services continue to hold a monthly Children in Custody meeting. This is aligned with a business priority for the YJB to ensure custody is used appropriately. The meeting is attended by the Police, Emergency Duty Team and Custody Team. We focus on all children who were held for more than 12 hours. Stockton on average has 10 – 12 cases each month which meet this criterion. The meeting looks for assurance that these children have support in place. We have found in most cases the reason children are held for over 12 hours is because a 'live' investigation is ongoing, or the child is not fit for interview due to intoxication. We have also had an agreement in place with Aycliffe Secure Home where they will provide a PACE bed if one is available. Over the last 12 months we have had four children who were placed in a PACE bed before attending court the following day.

In partnership with CURV, Hartlepool and South Tees YJT we launched a Custody Navigator scheme in April 2023. The scheme has been further funded for 2025/26 and trained staff available six days a week to support children in custody. Good communication channels are in place, so information is shared across partners in a timely fashion, so children's needs are addressed.

Remands

The YJB National Standards validation visit in January 2024 felt our work in this area was outstanding. In the last 18 months we have reviewed our bail and remand policy, and this has formed part of an effective practice session with staff. The YJT provides a trained and specialist

Youth Justice Officer to attend each day, if required. We have an extensive range of bail packages available to the Court including Intensive Supervision and Surveillance (ISS). Good partnership relationships are in place with Police, CPS, defence solicitors, Children Services, and others. We work closely with Children Services, so appropriate support is provided if children have any accommodation issues. We have had high numbers of children appearing before Court who were at risk of being remanded in Custody. Over the past year we have had two children who have been remanded to custody. These were for serious offences which include Murder and Section 18 Wounding offences. However, within this period the YJT have provided robust bail packages to the Court which included the use of Bail Supervision and Support (BSS) and ISS. We have had 12 children subject to bail packages where either a remand or extensive bail conditions have been actively pursued by the CPS.

The Ministry of Justice issued the Remand Concordat in February 2025 for Youth Justice Partnerships to improve the outcomes of children on remand. The document was discussed at our Management Board meeting April 2025. We have also held a partnership benchmarking exercise with the Police and Children Services. Consequently, we have formulated an action plan which includes meeting more regularly with the Courts and CPS to discuss relevant issues.

Use of custody

In last year's plan we had proposed how to reduce the use of custody in Stockton-on-Tees. We developed clear mechanisms which included, holding a pre-sentence meeting in all possible custody cases to ensure comprehensive community sentences were recommended to the court. In appropriate cases we have proposed ISS and the use of electronic monitoring. Our custody rate is currently at 0.28 which is higher than all other comparisons. The figure currently relates to six custodial sentences. All the custodial sentences relate to serious violent offences. The feedback from the YJB validation visit said Stockton-On-Tees YJT are 'making every effort to steer children away from custody.' We recognise that two children received two custodial sentences in a short period. However, the children were remanded at the time of the first custodial sentence and the Court wanted to progress matters.

Constructive resettlement

Over the last 12 months Stockton-on-Tees YJT has continued to focus attention on resettlement. We have considered the learning from HMI Probation thematic report into resettlement in 2019 and Case Management Guidance – Custody and Resettlement and YJB – How to Make Resettlement Constructive (Sept 2018). We recognised the importance of appropriate accommodation and ETE intervention on release to build a positive identity for the child. Since our last Youth Justice plan, we have had three children released from custody. Two children returned home to live with their family, and one was found a suitable placement. Our YJT ETE worker has provided specialist support to explore suitable options. Our CAHMS worker has also provided seamless support by liaising with health professionals in custody to ensure appropriate appointments were made for their return to the community. We have also ensured we have a range of personal development sessions in place, and this can range from cooking to going to the gym. We have also embedded bi-monthly resettlement discussions between the Team Manager and Youth Justice Officers for each resettlement case. The meetings are designed to provide an update on the plan and to overcome any potential barriers to effective resettlement.

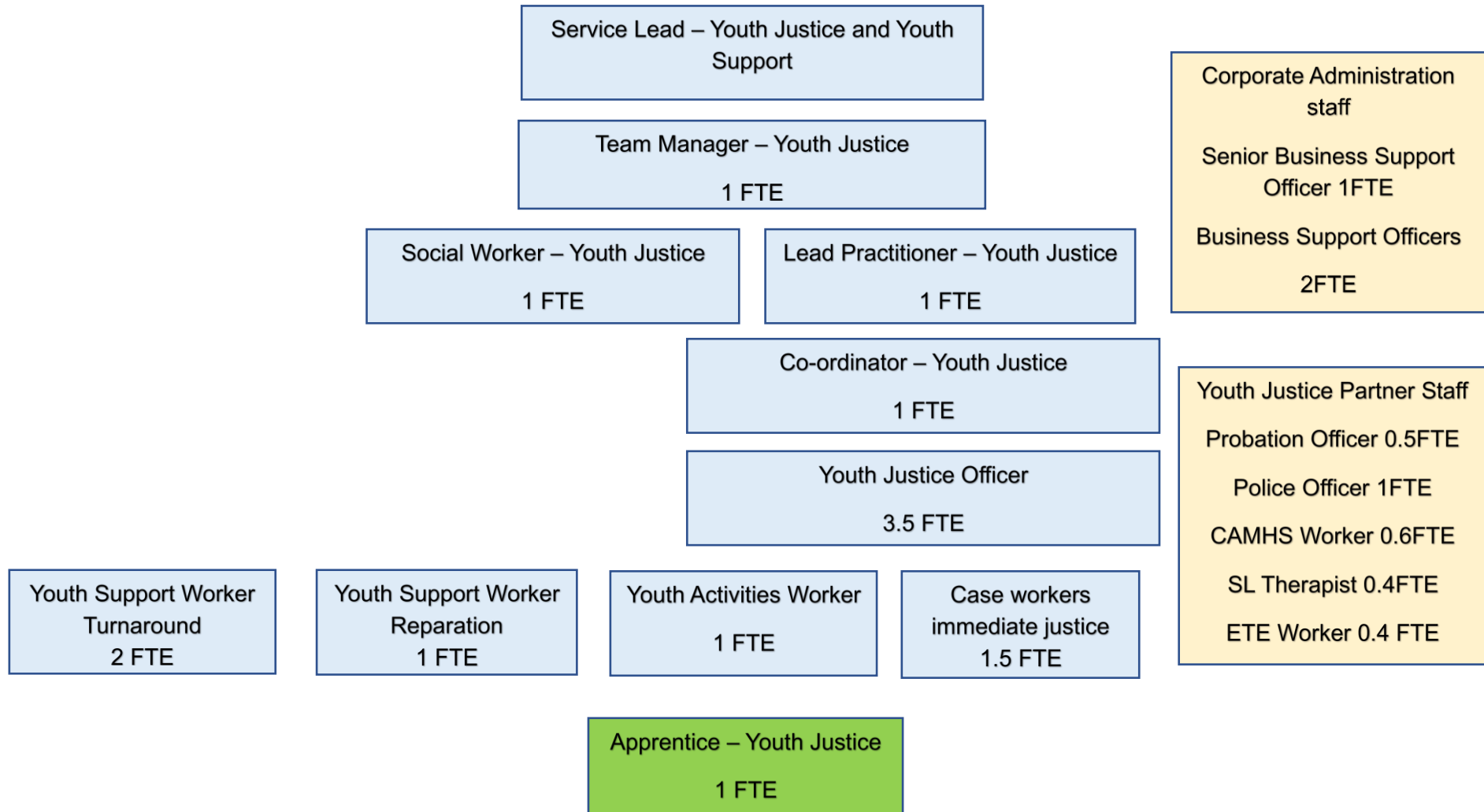
Standards for children in the justice system

The last YJB National Standards self-assessment was on standard two - At Court. The self-assessment determined our strategy as good and reports and process as outstanding. The YJB selected Stockton-On-Tees YJT for a validation visit. The YJB rated our work at court as outstanding across strategy, reports and process. They remarked, 'Outstanding practice is evidenced.' The YJB said in terms of an area of development Stockton needed to work with partners to re-establish a court user group. Consequently, we have achieved this although we still have an issue with the frequency of meetings. There was no requirement for a National Standards self-assessment for 2024-25. As the YJT have moved to Early Help, Youth Justice and Youth Support we have adopted the Service area approach to audit. This includes themed and collaborative audits. The latter cover key areas of work such as assessment, planning, intervention, and voice of the child. We anticipate undertaking 15 youth justice audits each year and we will aggregate our findings to continually develop and improve youth justice practice.

Appendix 1A: Staffing Demographics

Youth Justice Team staff demographics		
GENDER	Female	17
	Male	4
	Other	0
ETHNICITY	White	95.2%
	Asian	04.8%
	Black	0%
	Mixed	0%
	Other	0%
DISABILITY	YES	0
	NO	21

Appendix 1B: Youth Justice Team structure chart



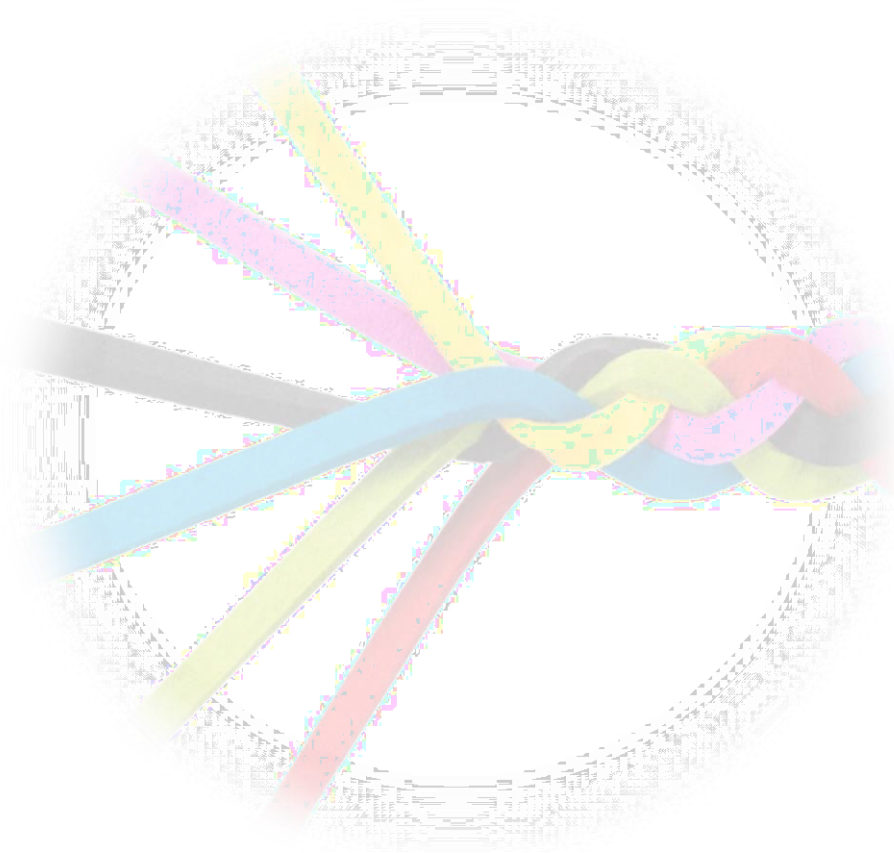
Appendix 2: Budget Costs and Contributions

Below is a summary of the YJT's financial profile for 2023-24. As in previous years, the majority of expenditure was on staffing costs.

BUDGET 2024/25	budget	outturn 2024/2025	outturn variance
Staff	832,086	832,086	0
Premises	42,778	42,778	0
Professional Services	31,500	31,500	
Indirect Staffing Costs (Transport & Training)	12,000	12,000	0
Office Costs	33,420	33,420	0
Central recharges	53,000	53,000	0
Total Expenditure	1,004,784	1,004,784	0
Income	1,004,784	1,004,784	0
Net Expenditure	0	0	0

Glossary

AssetPlus	A strengths based structured assessment tool based on research and developed by the Youth Justice Board looking at the child or young person's offence, personal circumstances and factors affecting desistance from crime
Child Exploitation	Safeguarding activity which focuses 'beyond the child's home and families,' to target those adults who are exploiting (targeting, tricking, and coercing) children for their own purposes and needs.
CURV	Cleveland's Unit for Reduction of Violence
ETAC	Exploitation Team Around the child.
ETE	Education, training, and employment; work to improve educational and learning outcomes
FTE	First-time entrants to the criminal justice system
HOTH	Harm Outside The Home
HMIP	HM Inspectorate of Probation
Justice System	Involves any or all of the agencies involved in upholding and implementing the law: police, courts, youth justice, probation, and custody providers.
MAPPA	Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements
OPCC	Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner
Pathways	The new YOT case management system
PDAT	Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool
Restorative Justice	The use of restorative approaches within a justice context. Brings those harmed by crime (victims) and those responsible for the harm (the offender) into communication, with a view to repairing the harm caused
Safety & Wellbeing	Terminology introduced by the YJB / AssetPlus to describe potential adverse outcomes where concerns exist that the young person's safety and well-being may be compromised through their own behaviour, personal circumstances or because of the acts / omissions of others
Safeguarding	Action taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm
YJB	Youth Justice Board
YJT	Youth Justice Team



For more information on this Plan, please contact the Youth Justice Team

youthjusticeadmin@stockton.gov.uk

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AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

18 SEPTEMBER 2025

REPORT OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

CABINET DECISION

Children and Young People - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Clare Besford

SCHOOL TERM AND HOLIDAY DATES 2026/2027

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is, following consultation, to present the proposed calendars of school term and holiday dates for 2026/2027 academic year.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)/DECISION(S)

To inform all schools and interested parties of the school term and holiday dates for 2026/2027 academic year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the school term and holiday dates 2026/2027 shown at **Appendix 1** to this report, be agreed.

DETAIL

1. School employers are required to set the term dates of their school year. Employers are:
 - 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.
2. In line with statutory requirements and the protocol agreed in 2008, consideration has been given to compile a set of term and holiday dates for schools in the Borough.
3. Officers consulted with colleagues from all neighbouring authorities to endeavour to reach consensus on a proposed model for the academic year.
4. Attached as **Appendix 1** are the proposed dates for 2026/2027.
5. 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 are provided at **Appendix 2**.
6. To date the neighbouring authorities that have published their dates have endorsed the proposed matrix for 2026/2027. This level of agreement between authorities will relieve many of the cross-boundary issues that some families have suffered in the past.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

This report has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment and has been judged to have a negative impact. This has been judged necessary because the pattern of school holidays around the christian festivals of Christmas and Easter and a long summer break between years is a national pattern that cannot be varied significantly locally or regionally. Exams and national tests together with School Teachers Pay and Conditions dictate the broad framework leaving only changes at the margins determined locally. Remedial actions have been identified and included in the EIA action plan.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

As outlined in paragraph 8, the joint agreement of the 2026/2027 matrices will ensure that, where children, families and carers live in one Borough, but the children attend school in another, there is a consistency across the area.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The recommendations comply with the requirements of the Education (School Day and School Year) (England) Regulations 1999 and the Education Act 2002 (Part 3, Chapter 1, Para 32)

RISK ASSESSMENT

The School Term and Holiday Dates 2026/2027 are categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

All schools and academies, Teacher Associations and Trade Unions, Neighbouring Local Authorities and Diocesan Authorities.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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Stockton on Tees Local Authority School Holiday and Term Dates 2026 - 2027

	AUGUST 2026	SEPTEMBER 2026	OCTOBER 2026	NOVEMBER 2026	DECEMBER 2026	JANUARY 2027
Monday	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23 30	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25
Tuesday	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26
Wednesday	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23 30	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27
Thursday	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28
Friday	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29
Saturday	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23 30
Sunday	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24 31

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	FEBRUARY 2027	MARCH 2027	APRIL 2027	MAY 2027	JUNE 2027	JULY 2027
Monday	1 8 15 22	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28	5 12 19 26
Tuesday	2 9 16 23	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29	6 13 20 27
Wednesday	3 10 17 24	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23 30	7 14 21 28
Thursday	4 11 18 25	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24	1 8 15 22 29
Friday	5 12 19 26	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23 30	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	2 9 16 23 30
Saturday	6 13 20 27	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26	3 10 17 24 31
Sunday	7 14 21 28	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27	4 11 18 25

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Bank Holiday	
School Holiday	

39
35
30
24
34
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The number of term days shown is 195. Up to five of these will be used as professional development (PD) days for teaching staff, pupils will not attend these days. PD days are determined by the individual schools and schools should inform parents accordingly.

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SCHOOL TERM & HOLIDAY DATES 2026 - 2027 CONSULTATION RESPONSES

The following groups/representatives were included in the consultation process:

- 4 Diocesan Authorities – comprising of Durham & Newcastle, Hexham & Newcastle, Middlesbrough and York
- Neighbouring Local Authorities
- Trade Union Representatives – presented at Joint Consultative Committee
- Headteachers/Principals of Secondary, Primary, Special and Free Schools and Academies in Stockton

RESPONSES RECEIVED

Diocesan Authorities

No comments received.

Neighbouring Local Authorities

Darlington, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland local authorities have published a calendar for 2026/27 which is the same as the proposed calendar for Stockton. Feedback from colleagues was positive as the dates are all in line.

Trade Union Representatives

No comments received.

Secondary Schools/Academies

No comments received.

Primary Schools/Academies

No comments received.

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CABINET INFORMATION ITEM ONLY

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

DATE 25/09/2025

**REPORT OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET INFORMATION ITEM

Digital and Customer Services - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Norma Stephenson

AI Strategic Approach

Summary

The Council is 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 will be scheduled for presentation to Cabinet at a forthcoming meeting.

Recognising that artificial intelligence is a rapidly emerging and evolving area of our work, the AI Strategic Approach has 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.

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

Recommended that the report be noted.

Detail

1. The AI Strategic Approach sets 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.
2. Strategic objectives include:
 - 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.
3. Key initiatives include:
 - 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.
 4. Implementation will follow a phased roadmap: Discovery, Pilots, Scaling and Integration, and Continuous Improvement. Projects will 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.
 5. The AI Strategic Approach is fully aligned with the Council's Powering Our Future Programme. Its primary driver is to ensure the best use of resources to deliver improved, efficient, and responsive services to our communities.

Consultation and Engagement

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

Next Steps

7. The next steps include identifying pilot projects that align 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 will ensure responsible oversight. Aligned with the Colleagues Mission, the council will support staff ensuring the workforce is equipped with the skills needed for the future. This includes 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, we will work with communities ensuring that the benefits of AI are inclusive and contribute to reducing digital inequality.
8. The strategic approach will 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.

Please see AI Strategic Approach document distributed with this information item.

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Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Strategic AI Approach

Harnessing Artificial Intelligence to transform public services

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Executive Summary

This AI strategy outlines a comprehensive approach for leveraging artificial intelligence to enhance service delivery, drive operational efficiency, and support data-driven decision-making. Through responsible AI adoption, the council can provide residents with improved, personalised experiences while optimising resource management and reducing operational costs. This strategy establishes a framework for ethical AI implementation, ensuring transparency, inclusivity, and accountability.

Context and Background

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is facing increasing demands for efficient, responsive, and inclusive public services. Artificial Intelligence presents an opportunity to address some of these challenges by automating routine tasks, predicting service demands, and enhancing decision-making processes. Through the strategic implementation of AI, governed and reported through Powering Our Futures Programme, Technical aspects managed through Digital Service Group (DSG), who are responsible for strategic council-wide oversight of the development of digital services, systems, technologies and solutions, the council can streamline operations, improve service quality, and ensure that resources are used more effectively. AI technologies, such as machine learning and natural language processing can be harnessed to develop sophisticated systems that can anticipate the needs of residents, offer personalised solutions, and provide real-time support.

Moreover, the council recognises the importance of adopting AI responsibly, ensuring alignment with its core values of being open, honest and transparent. To this end, the council is committed to establishing a robust governance framework delivered through the council's AI Strategy Group which ensures the strategic council-wide oversight of developments including reviewing proposed AI use cases, ensuring a clear purpose and benefit, assessing risk, ethics and data protection. The creation of an AI Ethics Group will oversee the ethical implementation of AI initiatives. The decision on the investment in AI will be made by Corporate Management Team in a determined forum.

This framework will ensure that all AI applications are developed and deployed with a focus on transparency, inclusivity, and accountability, thereby fostering public trust and safeguarding the interests of all stakeholders.

By embracing AI-driven transformation, the council aims to create a more efficient, equitable, and responsive service environment that meets the evolving needs of its community.

Vision Statement

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council aims to become an AI enabled organisation where artificial intelligence empowers our workforce, enhances service delivery, and upholds our commitment to ethical governance and environment sustainability.

Definition of AI

For this AI strategy, the Council will be using the definition of AI as proposed by HM Government.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) as an umbrella term for a range of algorithm-based technologies that solve complex tasks by carrying out functions that previously required human thinking. AI systems are designed to simulate human cognition, allowing machines to learn, adapt, and improve over time through algorithms, data, and models.

Strategic Objectives

This AI strategy is designed to achieve the following key objectives:

Enhance Service Delivery

- Implement AI to automate routine tasks, freeing up staff time for high-value work.
- Provide 24/7 self-service options, where required, using AI-powered chatbots (Virtual Assistants) and enhancement of self-service solutions through the use of AI.
- Improve accessibility and provide personalised services for residents.

Operational Efficiency and Cost Savings

- Streamline processes using AI for predictive maintenance and resource management.
- Optimise workforce planning using AI-driven data analysis.

Data-Driven Decision Making

High-quality well-managed data is foundational for effective AI. The council will:

- Establish robust data governance practices for the use of AI, ensuring data accuracy, privacy and security.
- Develop AI tools to analyse data, generate insights, and support evidence-based policy making.
- Create dashboards and predictive models for proactive service management.
- Establish an approach of the use of AI within and integrating with existing line of business applications.

Skill Development and Culture

- Provide AI knowledge, training and upskilling programs for staff
- Foster a culture of innovation through cross-functional collaboration and experimentation, while ensuring that all AI implementations are carried out with caution, prioritising ethical considerations and mitigating potential risks.

Ethics, Transparency, and Inclusivity

AI systems will operate transparently, with clear

explanations provided where automated decision making takes place. This fosters trust and allows residents to understand how AI influences public services. AI applications must comply with existing laws and uphold ethical standards. The council will:

- Establish a governance framework for the ethical use of AI.
- Promote transparency in AI decision-making processes.
- Ensure AI systems are free from bias and accessible to all residents.

Key Initiatives

To achieve the strategic objectives, the council will implement the following AI initiatives:

AI-Powered Customer Service

- Deploy conversational AI chatbots (Virtual Assistants) on the council website to handle routine queries.
- Implement voice recognition for contact centers to assist residents with self-service options.

Intelligent Process Automation (IPA)

- Automate back-office functions such as applications, claims processing, licensing.
- Use AI to extract insights from unstructured data, like reports and case files.

Predictive Analytics for Service Management

- Develop predictive models to forecast service demands (e.g. social care needs, housing support).
- Develop predictive models to analyse potential risk factors (e.g. for use in Early intervention and prevention).
- Monitor infrastructure through sensor data for predictive maintenance.

AI for Compliance and Risk Management

- Use AI to detect anomalies and prevent fraud in financial transactions.
- Implement sentiment analysis to understand public feedback and identify emerging issues.

AI in Decision Support

- Provide decision-makers with AI-driven dashboards for real-time data insights.
- Develop scenario-based modeling to evaluate policy impacts.

AI in empowering staff in the use of AI

- Development of an AI usage policy defining where and how it is agreed to use AI within roles.
- AI literacy program, mandatory digital learning for staff on AI basics, bias and ethics.
- Role specific training on AI use cases.
- Implementation of AI tools to aid staff to do their job.
- AI-powered solution aiming to streamline the process of writing case notes and assessments, freeing up valuable time for social workers to focus on direct client care.

Implementation Roadmap

The council will adopt a phased approach to AI implementation, ensuring continuous learning and improvement.

AI projects will be governed and reported through Powering Our Futures Programme, Technical aspects managed through Digital Service Group (DSG), ensuring strategic council-wide oversight of AI developments.

The roadmap consists of the following phases:

Phase 1: Discovery and Assessment	Phase 2: Pilot and Experimentation	Phase 3: Scaling and Integration	Phase 4: Continuous Improvement (Ongoing)
Identify opportunities, conduct feasibility studies, and engage stakeholders.	Implement AI pilots in selected service areas, evaluate results, and capture lessons learned.	Expand successful AI solutions across departments, ensuring proper governance and monitoring.	Continuously refine AI applications, ensure transparency, and adapt to evolving technology.

Environmental commitment

Reducing the carbon footprint of AI

The council recognises the environmental impact of AI, particularly the high energy demand for large-scale data processing. All AI implementations will align with the councils Environmental Sustainability and Carbon Reduction Strategy, prioritising, where possible, tools that promote energy efficiency and sustainable practices.

Sustainable AI practices

By promoting sustainable AI practices, the council aims to support its climate change objectives and lead by example in responsible technology use.

Exclusions

We will not use AI in the following areas, unless reassessed and formally approved through governance channels.

- Automated decision making without human oversight. All decisions that impact rights, access to services or financial outcomes will require human validation.
- Facial recognition in public places, due to privacy, bias and surveillance risks.
- Predictive enforcement tools, such tools are incompatible with transparency, bias control and public trust.
- AI in recruitment without human review, AI recruitments decisions must retain human-led review and scoring.

Risk Management

The council acknowledges that the AI market is constantly evolving which poses a risk to any product the council develops or procures as such the council has put the following mitigations in place and will keep risks under review.

To ensure responsible AI adoption, each AI project will include a comprehensive risk assessment to identify potential ethical, operational, and environmental risks. Mitigation plans will be developed for identified risks, with contingency plans in place for high-risk scenarios. Addressing potential risks such as:

- Bias and Discrimination – Implement bias detection mechanisms and ensure diverse datasets.
- Data Privacy and Security – Apply robust data protection policies and monitor data usage.
- Transparency and Accountability – Establish clear governance frameworks and explainable AI models.
- Skills Gaps – Provide training programs to upskill staff on AI literacy.
- Financial and Operational Risks – Start with pilot projects and conduct ongoing cost-benefit analysis.

Monitoring and Evaluation

This strategy will be reviewed yearly with each version agreed by the Corporate Management Team in a determined forum, following consultation with stakeholder groups and elected members. This strategy will also be reviewed and adjusted based on technological advancements, feedback and evolving local needs and the needs of our customers.

The council will measure the success of the AI strategy using key performance indicators (KPIs), including:

- Reduction in service processing time.
- Improved customer satisfaction scores.
- Cost savings through automation.
- Increased staff capacity.
- Enhanced data-driven decision-making capabilities.

Governance and Ethics

AI Ethics group

An AI Ethics group will be established to oversee the responsible implementation of AI solutions. This group will ensure compliance with ethical standards, review AI performance, ensure a human in the loop approach, ensure bias mitigation and accessibility checks and provide guidance on mitigating potential risks. The council's current EPIA process will be followed where needed as part of the implementation of AI.

The council is committed to harnessing AI to improve services and deliver value to residents. Approval of this AI strategy will enable the council to initiate pilot projects, establish governance structures, and develop staff capabilities. By adopting AI responsibly, the council will set a precedent for digital innovation within the council.

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AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

29th August 2025

REPORT OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

COUNCIL DECISION/CABINET DECISION

Health and Adult Social Care - Lead Cabinet Member - Cllr Pauline Beall

Health and Wellbeing Board: revised Terms of Reference

SUMMARY

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

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)/DECISION(S)

The review and subsequent revision of the Health and Wellbeing Board's Terms of Reference were undertaken to ensure the Board remains fit for purpose and effective, with a clear role and defined responsibilities to oversee and drive delivery of the new Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Stockton-on-Tees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Cabinet approve the revised Terms of Reference for the Health and Wellbeing Board and recommend their approval and adoption by Full Council.

DETAIL

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 have 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 behaviors.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

A specific community impact assessment was not undertaken. However, the community impact has been incorporated into the development process of this new revised TOR.

The revision of the Health and Wellbeing Board's ToR presents an opportunity to sharpen the Board's focus, enhance clarity of purpose, and increase its effectiveness in improving population health and reducing health inequalities. The updated ToR is designed to strengthen collaboration across system partners, ensure greater strategic alignment, and reaffirm the Board's leadership role in addressing health inequalities and the wider determinants of health.

In addition, the revised ToR aims to create space to embed a stronger community voice and improve representation, while also enhancing transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to local needs and priorities.

The revision of the Health and Wellbeing Board's Terms of Reference has been undertaken in parallel with the development of the new Health and Wellbeing Strategy, ensuring consistency between the two and incorporating consideration of the anticipated positive impacts for the residents of Stockton.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

The revision of the Health and Wellbeing Board's Terms of Reference does not directly address corporate parenting. However, the new Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which the Board is responsible for driving forward, includes corporate parenting as a priority commitment area.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

In developing the revised Terms of Reference for the Health and Wellbeing Board, legal implications have been considered to ensure compliance with relevant legislation. Statutory membership and functions have been maintained, and the revisions uphold transparency and accountability requirements.

RISK ASSESSMENT

This revised Health and Wellbeing Board TOR is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

The revised Terms of Reference for the Health and Wellbeing Board will have a borough-wide impact across Stockton-on-Tees. Their development was informed by a series of workshops involving all current members of the Board.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A

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Stockton-on-Tees Health and Wellbeing Board

Terms of Reference

1. Purpose

The Stockton-on-Tees Health and Wellbeing Board serves as the principal and statutory **strategic partnership** for improving health and wellbeing and tackling inequalities across the borough. It brings together senior leaders from health, social care, public health, the voluntary and community sector, and wider partners to provide collective leadership, support integrated working, and oversee the implementation of priorities set out in the joint health and wellbeing strategy. The Board plays a vital role in strengthening collaboration across the system and ensuring that local population needs and resident priorities inform the design and delivery of services.

2. Objectives

The Stockton-on-Tees Health and Wellbeing Board will:

2.1 Develop and maintain a joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA)

Maintain a robust, evidence-informed understanding of the current and future health, care, and wellbeing needs of the local population, including wider determinants, health inequalities, and system pressures, to inform shared priorities and guide the development and delivery of the joint health and wellbeing strategy.

2.2 Develop and drive delivery of the joint health and wellbeing strategy (JHWS)

- To create a shared strategic vision and a set of evidence-informed priorities to improve health and wellbeing and reduce inequalities in Stockton-on-Tees. The JHWS will serve as the overarching framework for coordinated system-wide action, co-produced with partners and communities, and will guide the planning, commissioning, and delivery of services across the local health and care system.
- To provide strategic oversight of the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS) implementation through the establishment of a robust monitoring and accountability framework. This framework will drive delivery, track progress, and support continuous improvement. It will include a high-level action plan reviewed annually, a programme of in-year review sessions, and an outcomes dashboard to monitor progress against the strategy's key outcomes.
- To identify and commit to a limited number of key priority areas within the joint health and wellbeing strategy (JHWS) for which the Board will take a proactive role; to drive action and champion system-wide advocacy in support of the delivering on the objectives.

2.3 Approve the local Better Care Fund (BCF) plan

Ensure that the local BCF plan aligns with the JHWS, reflects local priorities around prevention, integration, and reducing inequalities, and provide formal approval of the plan.

2.4 Align strategic plans and resources

Provide strategic influence over partners' commissioning intentions and plans to ensure alignment with agreed local priorities. Ensure that services and investments are guided by population needs, evidence-based practice, and avoid duplication.

2.5 Promote a 'Health in All Policies' approach

Embed health and wellbeing considerations across all local policy, decision-making, and service planning, recognizing the impact of social, economic, and environmental factors on health and wellbeing outcomes.

2.6 Champion Prevention and Early Intervention

Promote a proactive focus on prevention by supporting strategies and interventions that address the root causes of poor health outcomes, improve quality of life, and reduce reliance on reactive and crisis services.

2.7 Engage and Involve Residents and Communities

Champion the voice of residents by embedding lived experience, community insight, and co-production into the planning, commissioning, and evaluation of services, strategies and plans.

2.9 Inform and Influence NHS Commissioning Plans

Work collaboratively with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to shape and inform the development and review of NHS commissioning plans, ensuring alignment with the joint health and wellbeing strategy and responsiveness to local needs.

2.10 Assess Pharmaceutical Needs

Oversee the production and regular updating of the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA), which informs the commissioning of local pharmaceutical services.

3. Membership and chair arrangements

3.1 Membership

Membership of the Board reflects its role as a strategic partnership, bringing together senior leaders from a wide range of organisations to provide collective leadership on health and wellbeing. The Board will include representation from all relevant statutory partners, alongside key local stakeholders whose contributions are essential to improving population health, reducing inequalities, and delivering the priorities set out in the Stockton-on-Tees joint health and wellbeing strategy.

The composition of the membership will be kept under regular review to ensure it remains inclusive, representative, and aligned with the strategic aims of the Board and the evolving priorities of the JHWS.

The core membership includes senior representation from the following organisations:

- **Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (elected members and officers)**
 - **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

 - **Officers:**
 - Director of Public Health
 - Director of Children's Services
 - Director of Adults, Health and Wellbeing
 - Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth

- **Northeast and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board**
- **Hartlepool and Stockton Health (HASH)**
- **Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees**
- **Catalyst Stockton-on-Tees**
- **Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner**
- **North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust**
- **Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust**

The Board may invite individuals or representatives of organisations, either on a temporary or standing basis, to provide specific expertise, representation, or insight in relation to specific agenda items or priority areas within the JHWS.

3.2 Chair arrangements

The Health and Wellbeing Board is chaired by the **Leader of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council**. The Chair leads the Health and Wellbeing Board, ensuring it operates effectively as a strategic partnership to fulfil its statutory duties and drives delivery of the joint health and wellbeing strategy. They facilitate inclusive and effective meetings, promote collaborative decision-making, and act as an advocate for system-wide action to improve health and reduce inequalities across the borough.

A Vice-Chair will be nominated by the Board and must be a representative from a partner organisation other than Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. The appointment will be confirmed by consensus of Board members. The Vice-Chair will support the Chair in their duties and act in their absence to ensure continuity of leadership. The Vice-Chair appointment will be reviewed annually. In the event of the resignation of the Vice Chair, the Board shall appoint a successor at the earliest meeting following the vacancy.

3.3 Substitutes

Board members will nominate a **named** substitute to attend meetings on their behalf when they are unable to do so. Substitutes must be senior and authorised to act and make decisions on behalf of the organisation they represent. Substitutes for Elected Members must also be Elected Members of the local authority.

Except for the Chair and Vice Chair, substitutes attending meetings shall carry the full rights and responsibilities of the member they represent, including voting rights where applicable. Substitutes for the Chair or Vice Chair shall retain voting rights but shall not undertake the full duties of those roles.

The use of substitutes should be **by exception** and limited to ensure continuity and consistency of representation across the Board.

3.4 Members commitments

All members are expected to contribute constructively to a culture of trust, mutual respect and shared purpose, supporting the Board in operating as an effective strategic partnership. Members agree to:

- **Prioritise attendance** at Board meetings and contribute actively to discussions, decision-making, and the delivery of agreed actions.
- **Act as senior representatives** of their organisations, with the authority to commit to partnership priorities and influence strategic direction.
- **Support collective leadership** and system-wide thinking in the interests of improving population health and reducing inequalities across Stockton-on-Tees.
- **Promote collaboration and integration** within and across organisations, and support alignment with the Stockton-on-Tees joint health and wellbeing strategy.
- **Communicate and cascade relevant information** within their organisations and ensure follow-through on Board decisions and commitments.

4. Governance and Accountability

The Health and Wellbeing Board is a statutory committee of the local authority, established under Section 194 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012. Functionally, it will operate as a **strategic partnership**, bringing together senior leaders to drive collaborative action on shared priorities within the joint health and wellbeing strategy.

The Board is not an executive body and does not hold direct commissioning responsibilities. However, it plays a vital strategic leadership role, shaping and influencing decisions on health, care, and wellbeing spending to ensure alignment with local needs and the priorities set out in the joint health and wellbeing strategy.

The Board is not a scrutiny or regulatory body. Its purpose is to set strategic direction, promote collaboration, and support system-wide improvements. In contrast, scrutiny committees provide independent oversight, examine decisions, and promote accountability and transparency. The Health and Wellbeing Board will maintain a constructive working relationship with relevant scrutiny committees to support shared learning, complementarity, and alignment across the system.

While the Board does not have executive authority over partner organisations, all members are expected to:

- Commit to and support collective decision-making
- Act as ambassadors for the Board's agreed priorities
- Promote alignment within their own organisations
- Ensure delivery through their respective governance and accountability structures

5. Place within the local governance landscape

The Health and Wellbeing Board sits within the wider local governance landscape as a system-level partnership, providing strategic oversight and direction across health, care, and wellbeing. It informs and aligns the work of related statutory and partnership bodies, ensuring that plans, commissioning activity, and delivery across the system are shaped by shared priorities and a robust understanding of local population needs, as set out in the JSNA and joint health and wellbeing strategy.

The Health and Wellbeing Board maintains a strategic interface with the Northeast and North Cumbria Integrated Care System (ICS), specifically through the ICB and any place-based partnership operating in Stockton. The Board will collaborate with ICS structures to ensure place-based priorities influence system-level decisions, and that ICS delivery is locally responsive.

6. Meetings and ways of working

6.1 Quorum

A meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board shall be considered quorate when at least 50% of the total membership is in attendance, including a minimum of three representatives from partner organisations.

If the meeting is not quorate, discussions may proceed informally, but **no formal decisions** shall be made until a quorate meeting is convened.

6.2 Decision-Making

The Board operates on a principle of **consensus decision-making**. Where consensus cannot be reached, the Chair may call for a vote. In such instances:

- Each member present will have **one vote**.
- Decisions will be determined by a **simple majority** of those present and eligible to vote.
- In the event of a tie, the **Chair shall have the casting vote**.

6.3 Frequency and Format of Meetings

The Board will hold **quarterly public meetings**. Additional **closed or informal sessions** may be convened, where appropriate, to support the development of strategic priorities, organizational development or conduct confidential discussions.

Agendas and supporting papers will be circulated to all members at least five clear working days in advance of each meeting.

All reports and documents submitted to the Board should be:

- Clear and concise, avoiding unnecessary jargon.
- Accompanied by an executive summary that outlines key issues, recommendations, and actions required.
- Prepared in a way that facilitates informed discussion and effective decision-making.

7. Sub-working groups and working arrangements

To support the delivery of the joint health and wellbeing strategy and the Board's objectives, the Board will establish sub-groups or task and finish working groups focused on specific priority areas. These groups will:

- Operate under clear terms of reference approved by the Board.
- Be time-limited or standing, depending on the scope and nature of their work.
- Report to the Board, through the agreed monitoring and accountability framework for the delivery of the JHWS.

Each sub-working group will be accountable to the Board for its activities and outputs. The Board will maintain oversight of these groups to ensure coherence, avoid duplication, and support a joined-up approach.

8. Review of Terms of Reference

- The Terms of Reference will be reviewed on an **annual basis** to ensure they remain current and fit for purpose in line with evolving legislation, local priorities, and organisational arrangements.
- Any proposed changes to the Terms of Reference will be subject to agreement by the Health and Wellbeing Board and formal approval and adoption by Cabinet and full Council.
- The Board will also undertake periodic reviews of its effectiveness, including membership, governance arrangements, and delivery against its strategic objectives, to identify areas for improvement.