

Cabinet

A meeting of Cabinet was held on Thursday 13th November 2025.

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

Officers: Peter Bell, Julie Butcher, Kirsty Grundy, Majella McCarthy, Ged Morton, Jonathan Nertney, Junita Agyapong, Sarah Bowman-Abouna, Tracey Carter, Vanessa Housley, Roisin McKenzie, Carolyn Nice and Lisa Tague.

Also in attendance: Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Lynn Hall and Cllr Eileen Johnson

Apologies: None.

CAB/59/25 Evacuation Procedure

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

CAB/60/25 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2025

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 October be approved.

CAB/61/25 Declarations of Interest

There were no declaration of interests.

CAB/62/25 Council Motion - Livestreaming Meetings

Consideration was given to a report that provided an update on the implementation of the Council's unanimously supported motion to livestream and record public meetings held in the Council Chamber. The motion reflected a cross-party commitment to openness, accessibility, and public engagement in local democracy.

To ensure effective delivery, it was proposed that Cabinet refer the matter to the Members Advisory Panel (MAP) to develop a comprehensive policy and implementation plan, addressing technical, financial, accessibility, and governance considerations.

At its meeting in September 2025, the Council approved a motion requesting that all public meetings held in the Council Chamber be recorded and, where possible, livestreamed to support openness and transparency. The motion was supported by all political groups. A copy of the motion was contained within the report.

The Dicentis audio-visual system currently supports hybrid meetings. Livestreaming introduces additional requirements, including:

- a) Camera control and speaker tracking;
 - b) Real-time moderation and technical oversight;
 - c) Secure integration with a public-access platform;
 - d) Storage, captioning, and publication processes.
7. Initial assessments suggest manual camera operation and staffing support will be required. A technical solution is being explored with the equipment provider.

To ensure inclusivity and compliance with legal obligations, all videos published by the Council must meet accessibility standards. Adherence to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 Level AA is not optional but a legal and ethical responsibility. Accessible videos empower users with visual, auditory, cognitive, or motor impairments to engage with content meaningfully. The Local Government Association supports the use of digital technologies to enhance democratic engagement and accessibility.

For videos that remain on the site after live streaming, the following criteria must be met: they must include a transcript detailing visuals, spoken dialogue, and contextual sounds; synchronised closed captions must be provided; any media that auto-plays for more than five seconds must offer a way to pause, stop, or hide it; audio that plays automatically for more than three seconds must allow users to stop, pause, mute, or adjust volume; and flashing content must not exceed three flashes per second. For live-streamed videos, the standards are more relaxed, captions should be provided to support accessibility.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The matter be referred to the Members Advisory Panel (MAP) to develop a livestreaming and recording policy, covering:
 - a. Filming arrangements, copyright, retention, and consent;
 - b. Platform options for publication (e.g. Council website, YouTube);
 - c. Accessibility features including captions and transcripts;
 - d. Safeguards such as broadcast delay or editing capability.
2. MAP be requested to, supported by officers, assess financial and staffing implications, including ongoing operational, accessibility, and moderation requirements.
3. MAP be requested to advise on governance measures to ensure recordings are not misconstrued as formal Council decisions, with appropriate disclaimers applied.
4. MAP be requested to bring forward a detailed, costed implementation plan for Cabinet approval, once practical, technical, and financial issues have been resolved.

CAB/63/25 Council Motion - Flying the Union Flag

Consideration was given to a report that outlined proposals for implementing the Council's unanimously agreed motion to fly the Union Flag year-round on all Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council office premises. The motion reflected cross-party support for a consistent and respectful approach to recognising the national flag across the Borough.

It was recommended that Cabinet refer the matter to the Members Advisory Panel (MAP) to provide advice on the practical, financial, and governance arrangements required to update the Council's Flag Flying Policy. This included defining which Council buildings are considered "public-facing," assessing the feasibility and cost of installing additional flagpoles, and ensuring compliance with planning and safety regulations.

At its meeting in September 2024, Council approved a motion requesting that the Union Flag be flown all year round on all Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council office premises. The motion was supported by all political groups. A copy of the motion was detailed within the report.

The Council already had an adopted Flag Flying Policy covering Stockton Town Hall and the Council's headquarters. The policy provided for the Union Flag to be flown continuously at the headquarters and on designated days at the Town Hall, alongside other flags such as the Commonwealth, Armed Forces Week and Pride flags.

A copy of the Council's flag flying policy was attached to the report. This policy related to the flying of flags on the Council's main headquarters building and Stockton Town Hall. The policy provided for the Union Flag to be flown from the headquarters building at all times and for the Union Flag to be flown on the Town Hall with the exception of designated days for other flags as outlined below:

March (second Monday in March) - Commonwealth Day - Commonwealth Flag

23 April - St George's Day - St George's Flag

End of June (fly for one week) (these dates change each year) - Armed Forces Week - Armed Forces Week flag

June – Pride - Rainbow Flag

3 September - Merchant Navy Day - Red Ensign

15 September - Battle of Britain Day - Royal Air Force Flag

The Council owns approximately 270 properties, of which only a proportion would be regarded as public-facing (for example, Dunedin House, libraries and customer contact centres). Further technical work was required to determine which sites were suitable for inclusion within any extended policy.

The flagpole at Dunedin House was commissioned when the Council's headquarters moved there, to ensure that a flag could continue to be flown in accordance with the existing policy. The installation was therefore a continuation of established practice rather than a new initiative.

A list of buildings that could be deemed as public facing was attached to the report, including comments on the feasibility of installing a freestanding or building mounted flagpoles and other considerations.

Members were asked to provide a view on whether any of these public facing Council buildings should be subject to further site investigations with a view to bringing them into the Council's flag flying policy.

Under the advertisement regulations flying flags does not necessarily require advertisement consent provided that certain criteria are met. However, all flags must:

- Be adequately maintained

- Kept in a safe condition
- Have the landowner's permission
- Not obscure or hinder road, rail, waterway or aircraft signs

Flagpoles can be floor, wall or roof mounted and the size of flag flown was determined by the size of the pole. The new flagpole at Dunedin House was floor mounted. As well as material, other considerations include weight, diameter, thickness and wind loading guarantees.

The life span of the flag itself varied depending on the location of the flag pole and weather conditions and periodic replacement of flags also needs to be planned for. The structural wind loading for the flagpole would determine whether more than one flag can be flown at the same time as well as the size of the flag. The flagpole at Dunedin House did not allow for more than one flag to be flown at the same time. Specialist companies offer site surveys and wind calculations.

As an indicator of cost, the most popular size of flagpole in the UK was 6m in height with a 2-yard flag. A glass fibre floor mounted 6m flagpole can retail from £432 to £861. A 2-yard Union Flag retails for around £75. Costs would however vary significantly depending on the specification. Installation costs would be additional.

A decision around the costs in relation to the installation of a flagpole at any new site cannot be confirmed without a site investigation and quotation from a specialist supplier. Site investigations would be required for all buildings to assess the structural integrity of the building if wall or roof mounted options are to be looked at and also the checking of underground utility apparatus for any freestanding options. How the flags are to be raised and lowered would also need to be considered along with any maintenance of the flagpoles. Wall mounted options may require ladder or cherry picker access.

Ground-based flagpoles require suitable foundations and underground service checks, together with structural calculations to verify wind loading, safe access for raising and lowering, and arrangements for inspection and maintenance. Wall- or roof-mounted options may require additional specialist assessment and access equipment.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The matter be referred to the Members Advisory Panel (MAP) to:
 - a) Advise on the effective implementation of the Council motion to fly the Union Flag year-round on all Council office premises;
 - b) Develop proposals for an updated Flag Flying Policy, including:
 - c) Clarification of which Council buildings are considered "public-facing";
 - d) Technical feasibility, planning, and safety considerations for additional flagpoles;
 - e) Financial implications of installation, maintenance, and replacement.
2. MAP be requested to advise Cabinet on a framework for approving future sites or variations, ensuring decisions are informed by appropriate technical and financial assessments.
3. MAP be requested to, supported by officers, report back to Cabinet with a revised and costed draft Flag Flying Policy for formal approval.

4. The current Flag Flying Policy (Appendix A of the report) has been updated to reflect the relocation of the Council's headquarters to Dunedin House and to include the current programme of memorial lighting be noted.

CAB/64/25 Anti Racism Charter

Consideration was given to a report on the Anti-Racism Charter.

Creating a fair, inclusive, and respectful workplace is central to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's values and commitment to equality.

The Council was committed to tackling racism in the workplace and promoting a diverse and inclusive workforce. Working in partnership with the Council's Employee Race Equality Network and endorsed by the Colleagues Powering Our Futures Board, an Anti-Racism Charter had been developed and was attached to the report.

The Charter demonstrated the Council's public commitment as an employer to actively challenge racial discrimination and advance equity and inclusion across the organisation. It outlined commitments to address racial disparities in recruitment, promotion, learning and development, disciplinary and grievance procedures, and pay and reward. It also recognised the impact racism can have on mental health and commits to creating a psychologically safe culture of belonging for Black, Asian, mixed-heritage and other ethnically diverse colleagues.

The Charter aligned with the Council's people policies, organisational culture and inclusive values. Signing the Charter reinforced the Council's compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and supported the Public Sector Equality Duty by demonstrating due regard to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations.

It was proposed that Cabinet recommend the Charter to Council for adoption and invite the Mayor, Leader and Chief Executive to sign the Charter on behalf of the Council, together with the Lead of the Employee Race Equality Network and Trade Union representatives signing on behalf of employees.

RECOMMENDED to Council that:-

1. The Anti-Racism Charter be adopted (Appendix A of the report) as a statement of the Council's corporate commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.
2. The Mayor, Leader of the Council and Chief Executive sign the Anti-Racism Charter on behalf of the Council at the meeting of Council, alongside the Lead of the Employee Race Equality Network and Trade Union representatives signing on behalf of employees.
3. The implementation of the Charter will be overseen through the officer led Colleagues Powering Our Futures Board, with progress reported to Cabinet after twelve months.
4. Ensure that all Members of the Council complete Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training at least once every two years, or more frequently if required under the Council's mandatory training policy for Members.

CAB/65/25 Procurement Plan/Higher Value Contracts

Consideration was given to a report that sought approval for the award of three planned higher value contracts where the value exceeded the limit on officer delegated authority and which were either funded within the approved MTFP/ Capital Programme or were subject to a bid for external funding.

The constitution defined a range of decisions that required a specific Cabinet approval, the financial threshold for which was set at a level of £500k or more. Annex 1 of the report listed contracts that exceeded the financial threshold and had not otherwise been delegated to officers.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The contracts listed in Annex 1 of the report be approved.
2. The relevant Director or Assistant Director be given authority to make the specific contract award decision and any subsequent contract variation, annual inflationary uplifts (where allowed in the contract terms and conditions) and extension decision in accordance with the delegations listed in Annex 1 of the report.

CAB/66/25 School Performance 2024-25

Consideration was given to a report that presented a summary of provisional headline performance data for the academic year 2024-25 in all Key Stages for all providers across the Borough.

Primary schools continued to perform well. From September 2024, Ofsted no longer made an 'overall effectiveness' judgement. However, 100% of LA maintained primary schools and 97% of all primary schools had an Ofsted rating of good overall, or in all key judgements. Additionally, although only 3 schools had a current judgement of outstanding, ungraded inspections had identified a further 5 which were likely to be outstanding in all areas.

Outcomes for Stockton-on-Tees pupils in the primary sector were mostly above provisional national average for 2025. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher standards at the end of KS2 has improved in comparison with 2024 and was in line with the provisional national average in every area except writing. Although achievement in phonics was in line with the national average, it was not as strong as it had been in the past. However, there were strong improvement in reading outcomes at the end of KS2 in 2025.

Secondary outcomes were above 2025 north east averages in all areas. These results had been self-reported by the schools and academies themselves.

Post-16 outcomes (A*-E) continued to perform well. The area where they were not above national averages was in the top scores (A* and B) which reflected the regional picture.

Stockton-on-Tees continued to see a large number of in-year transfers including families new to England. For example, 50 children joined their school during Y6 from outside the LA and 63 were new during Y1. A significant proportion of pupils who were

new to the LA come from outside the English school system, although many were from neighbouring authorities. There were also a high number of transfer requests deemed 'parental preference' with children moving from one Stockton school to another. The mobility of the school population affects some schools more than others but should be recognised as a key factor when considering school performance.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The standards and achievements across the Stockton-on-Tees Borough be noted.
2. The strong overall performance of Stockton-on-Tees schools at both primary and secondary phases be noted.