

## **Cabinet**

A meeting of Cabinet was held on Thursday 11th December 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:** Mike Greene, Peter Bell, Julie Butcher, Andrea Green, Kirsty Grundy, Clare Harper, Louise Hollick, Reuben Kench, Graham Lyons, Neil Mitchell, Ged Morton, Iain Robinson, Mandie Rowlands, Marc Stephenson and Craig Taylor.

**Also in attendance:** Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Tony Riordan and Cllr Sylvia Walmsley.

**Apologies:** None.

### **CAB/67/25 Evacuation Procedure**

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

### **CAB/68/25 Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared.

### **CAB/69/25 Minutes**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2025.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2025 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

### **CAB/70/25 Scrutiny Review of Reablement Service - Final Report of Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee**

Consideration was given to a report that presented the outcomes of the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee's review of Reablement Service.

'Reablement' is a short period of rehabilitation which usually takes place in a person's own home.

National evidence suggested that supporting early and safe discharge from hospital into a reablement-type service delivers better outcomes for individuals when compared to longer periods of hospitalisation or immediate transfer into care at home. It was also cost-effective for health and adult social care services, both reducing pressure on bed-capacity in hospitals and the need for large packages of ongoing community or residential or nursing care. Research had continued to evidence that most people prefer to remain in their own homes and communities.

Locally, the Reablement Service provided support for people with poor physical or mental health to help them manage their illness / condition by learning or re-learning the skills necessary for daily living (so that they can remain in the community). The service sought to ensure that people can maximise their independence when they need it, this can include both 'step-up' care (escalation of need for people already supported to live independently) as well as 'step-down' (to avoid hospital admission or ensure safe discharges). It also promoted and supported people to be more independent and reduce the need for long-term service provision for as long as possible.

The offer was provided free (as mandated by the Care Act 2014) for the person receiving support for up to a maximum of six weeks. A person with ongoing care and support needs following this six weeks would be financially assessed for their ongoing contribution to their care.

There were a number of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Powering Our Future (POF) projects that link to this review; 'Supporting People to Live Independently' and 'Early Intervention and Prevention'. The final report produced by the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee would be submitted to these workstreams for their awareness.

The aim for this review was to identify whether the Reablement Service offered by SBC was:

- maximising independence for people being discharged from hospital and living in the community.
- reducing the need for ongoing, more intensive support in people's own homes and reducing the need for admission into 24-hour care.
- working effectively with NHS provision that supports people on a reablement pathway.
- using technology as effectively as possible.

The Committee took evidence from key personnel from within the SBC Adults, Health and Wellbeing directorate, North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB), North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust (NTHFT), and the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector (via Catalyst). Peopletoo, commissioned by SBC to assist in assessing the impact of current ways of working and analyse the best model for continuing to support people to maximise their independence, provided feedback on its own review of local services. The Committee also issued a survey to SBC Reablement Service staff, and other approaches in relation to this scrutiny topic were considered.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB):
  - a) provides a summary on the gap analysis of the NHS England good practice guidance for ICBs (commissioners and providers) titled 'Intermediate care framework for rehabilitation, reablement and recovery following hospital discharge' (2023), along with assurance on how it and its partners will be addressing any identified issues (e.g. a self-assessment by all relevant organisations within the health and care 'system').

b) more explicitly outlines the role and importance of reablement services (within the context of the overall health and care 'system') in future iterations of its overarching integrated care strategy.

2. North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust (NTHFT) reviews its discharge processes to ensure that eligible individuals who are ready to leave hospital are made fully aware of local reablement provision and are referred to it upon discharge from hospital.

3. Principal links / contacts for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC), NTHFT and the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector in relation to local reablement provision are identified / confirmed and shared in order to improve communication between key partners.

4. SBC and NTHFT establish required person-centred information on an individual when a referral is made into the SBC Reablement Service.

5. Regarding the future local reablement offer, SBC:

a) provides a summary of any differences in the findings of the Peopletoo review and reablement-related commentary from the Care Quality Commission (CQC) following its late-2024 inspection of SBC adult social care services.

b) confirms further planned changes to existing service delivery (structures, workforce) and the funding required to support this, and provides assurance on appropriate training uptake for new and existing staff.

c) explores whether any of its existing social care workforce outside the current SBC Reablement Service structure (e.g. Community Support Workers) can be utilised to increase staffing capacity for reablement provision.

6. SBC considers cost-effective options (and the communication of these) for individuals leaving the SBC Reablement Service to ensure a smooth transition from this initial support.

7. To increase public understanding of the Borough's reablement offer:

a) SBC and its partners assure themselves that they are adhering to the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) 'Supporting client and family engagement with reablement' (2024) guidance, utilising this resource to effectively raise awareness and promote the Borough's reablement offer.

b) SBC undertakes a joint communications campaign (repeated on a periodic basis) with NTHFT and the VCSE sector around local reablement services, making it clear what they involve, how they are accessed (including contact details), and the principal benefits.

8. Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees be asked to consider facilitating a public survey in 2026 to establish the availability of information on the local reablement offer for those who had spent time in hospital and the experiences of those who had received support from the service.

## **CAB/71/25 Scrutiny Review of Muslim and Faith Burial Services - Final Report of Place Select Committee**

Consideration was given to a report that presented the outcomes of the Place Select Committee's review of Muslim and Faith Burial Services.

The Council had a statutory duty to provide suitable burial provision, and it was one of the most essential and sensitive services that the Council provides. There could be significant social implications if the Council was not able to offer sufficient levels of burial provision to ensure that families can choose a grave space in geographical areas where they had a personal preference or local connection with. The review aimed to understand the need, as well as the associated financial and operational requirements, for the provisions of burial chambers/vaults within the Boroughs cemeteries as an alternative option to the standard grave plot.

At the time of this meeting all burials in the Borough were conducted in standard soil plots, with wooden frames used for Muslim burials. Burial chambers were a preference of some members of the Muslim community, and the Committee recognised the need for a balanced approach that respects cultural and religious practices. The recommendations therefore focused on extending burial provision by offering a small number of burial rings as an optional service for those who prefer them while maintaining traditional soil burial as the standard option. During the review requests were received for extending burial hours and the Committee recommended that further investigation into the feasibility and benefit that would be added by this is required.

The Committee had taken evidence from Bereavement Services at Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, as well as the two local Funeral Directors that carry out Muslim burials in the Borough. Local faith leaders had also shared their views on the topic, and evidence had been sought from four Local Authorities that had installed burial chambers/vaults.

RESOLVED that:-

1. To extend choice within the Borough's burial provision, a minimum of 10 concrete burial rings with the appropriate drainage are installed in the Muslim section of Thornaby cemetery. This should be an optional offer at an additional cost to those purchasing the plot. The number of burial rings installed may be extended if there is a greater demand for pre-purchasing these.
2. Officers carry out a further review of the operational feasibility of extending burial hours.

## **CAB/72/25 Financial Update and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)**

Consideration was given to a report on the Financial Update and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

Like many councils across the country, the Council was seeing greater demand and cost pressures across council services which was leading to a predicted larger overspend against budget by the end of 2025/26 financial year.

The areas that were experiencing the greatest budgetary challenges were Adults Social Care, Children's Social Care and Home to School Transport. Mitigating actions had been identified since Quarter 1 to positively reduce the forecast overspend to £4.127m. Work was continuing to identify further actions to mitigate the overspend, however if the current forecast position materialises this would need to be met from earmarked reserves, which was not a sustainable approach.

Over the summer the Government launched the Fair Funding Review 2.0 consultation, which was a fundamental change to how local authorities were funded. The Fair Funding Review 2.0 aimed to produce a fairer, evidence-based system that targeted funding towards areas with high deprivation and need. The Government had published their response to the consultation alongside a Local Government Policy Statement which gave an indication of how the changes would impact Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. The report included the latest estimate of the planned changes; however, the actual impact would not be known until the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement expected week commencing 15 December.

The report also provided an indicative update to the MTFP. The emerging position reflected rising costs and demand pressures which exceed the expected increase in Government funding. As a result, the projected budget gap across the MTFP had widened; £11.5m in 2026/27, £18.4m in 2027/28 and £18.7m in 2028/29.

The scale of this gap meant that a strengthened programme of service reviews, efficiencies and cost reductions would be required, alongside a measured and time-limited use of reserves with a clear replenishment strategy. Work was underway with Directors to identify a deliverable set of proposals for the February budget, with early emphasis on accelerating existing activity within Powering Our Future and expanding its scope where necessary.

Powering Our Future continued to provide the Council's overall framework for service transformation and improvement. It had already delivered several tangible benefits. However, given the heightened financial context, the programme needed to operate at a greater pace and scale. Over the coming weeks, Directors would be required to identify specific, evidenced savings proposals that could be progressed through POF and the design principles for inclusion in the 2026/27 budget, supported by clear delivery milestones.

Further detail on potential service changes, efficiency options and reserves strategy would be brought forward in the February budget report. The Council would also shortly begin consultation on the 2026/27 budget to support transparent decision-making and ensure stakeholders can understand and comment on the choices ahead.

The report also contained rationale for the virement of monies between projects within the Thornaby Town Deal programme, to support works in the Regeneration of Thornaby Town Centre workstream.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The updated financial position for 2025/26 be noted.
2. The revised Capital Programme at Appendix A of the report be noted.

3. The virement be approved of £500,000 from the Connecting Thornaby – Cycleways workstream allocation alongside £235,000 from the North Thornaby workstream into the Regenerating Thornaby Town Centre workstream.

4. The emerging issues for the MTFP be noted.

### **CAB/73/25 Review of Car Parking Charges**

Consideration was given to a report on the Review of Car Parking Charges.

The report outlined proposals for new car parking charges in Stockton and Yarm town centres following a review of current charges as agreed at July Cabinet following a motion, that was passed at the May 2025 Council meeting, which recommended Cabinet consider reintroducing a free first hour of parking in Yarm.

It was recommended Cabinet approve reintroducing the free first hour of short-stay car parking in both Yarm and Stockton town centres and introduce new charges for subsequent hours of £2 for 1 to 2 hours and £3.50 for more than 3 hours. It was also recommended to introduce charging £1.50 after 5pm in Wellington Square multi-storey car park only.

RESOLVED that the new car parking charges for Stockton and Yarm town centres be approved from 1st February 2026 as follows:-

Monday to Saturday (9am to 5pm)

- i. First hour free
- ii. £2 for 1 to 2 hours
- iii. £3.50 for 3+ hours
- iv. After 5pm £1.50 Wellington Square multi-storey car park only

### **CAB/74/25 Procurement Plan/Higher Value Contracts**

Consideration was given to a report on Procurement Plan/Higher Value Contracts.

The report sought approval from Cabinet for the award of three planned higher value contracts where the value exceeds 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 to the report listed contracts that exceeded the financial threshold and have not otherwise been delegated to officers.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The contracts listed in Annex 1 of the report be approved.
2. Authority be given to the relevant Director or Assistant Director 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/75/25 Minutes of Various Bodies**

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

TVCA Cabinet – 26 September 2025

SSP – 1 October 2025

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

## **CAB/76/25 Care Quality Commission Assurance Report**

Consideration was given to a report on the Care Quality Commission Assurance Report.

Stockton-on-Tees Adult Care Services were visited by CQC as part of the local authority assurance process which was introduced in 2023. This assesses how local authorities were performing in delivering adult social care responsibilities under Part 1 of the Care Act.

The final report was received in October 2025 and Stockton-on-Tees adult services were assessed as good. (Final Report was in Background Papers).

The CQC report highlighted areas of strength which confirmed the dedication and commitment of staff, partners, vision and leadership within Adults, Health and Wellbeing as well as the wider Council. As well as areas for development and improvement which were welcomed and would inform the ongoing development programme within the Directorate.

Good to Even Better was a further report that was included to provide the overview of Adult Social Care's response and next steps in implementing and embedding the changes and developments which would be needed to be even better.

On publication day an email was sent to all Councillors with link to the report. The findings of the CQC report had been shared with staff teams and a celebration event held thanking the staff for their hard work and commitment. The outcome had also been sent to partners and people with lived experience thanking them for being part of the assessment and subsequent successful outcome. Full Council had acknowledged the positive outcome of the assessment. Outcomes had been shared at regional level with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services. This provided regional assurance and support as well as shared learning across the North East.

With regard to the next steps the additional learning and areas for development would be used to inform a detailed action plan to ensure continuous improvement of the service, experience and outcomes for people.

Regular oversight and assurance reporting through governance channels would be provided as part of ongoing performance monitoring and scrutiny.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) report and outcome be noted.
2. The next steps on the Good to even better journey be noted.

#### **CAB/77/25 Tennis Court Management in Stockton on Tees**

Consideration was given to a report tennis court management in Stockton-on-Tees.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council owns and manages 11 public tennis courts, across 3 key locations. In partnership with Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) funding was received to upgrade Littleboy Park and install gate access systems across all sites with the main aim to improve access and long-term sustainability of local tennis facilities. A key funding condition from LTA was a court operator be appointed, We do Tennis (WDT) was appointed in 2023 and a pay-to-play model was piloted at Littleboy Park for a 2-year period. The Council had also been successful in accessing additional funding from LTA which had allowed the recent re-surfacing and upgrade of Ropner Park tennis courts.

The two-year WDT contract was due to expire in April 2025. A six-month extension was agreed to allow exploration of a new, collaborative Tees Valley Model, involving:

SBC, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland BC. This concession contract had expired, with the option of further extending the original contract for 2 months whilst decisions were considered and approvals were made moving.

It was proposed to extend the partnership with operator, We do Tennis, aligned to a regional Tees Valley model, which included extending the pay to play model across all 3 sites and 65/35% income split of all court related income.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The extended partnership with the operator, We Do Tennis, aligned with a Tees Valley regional model be continued.
2. A pay-to-play model be implemented across all 3 Parks Tennis sites to minimise financial risks and enable the longer-term sustainability of assets.

#### **CAB/78/25 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2025**

Consideration was given to a report on the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2025.

The report outlined how the Local Authority (LA) was meeting its duty to secure sufficient childcare and included information about the supply of and demand for childcare, details on any gaps in provision and an action plan on how they would be addressed.

The Childcare Act 2006 and 2016 and the associated statutory guidance for local authorities on Early Education and Childcare – April 2025, requires Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (the Local Authority) to secure sufficient childcare, as far as was reasonably practicable and within available resources, for working parents, or parents who were studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 – 14 (or up to 18 for



disabled children). Local authorities were also required to report annually to elected council members on how they were meeting this duty.

The sufficiency assessment would be placed on the Stockton Information Directory once it had been through the Cabinet process, so it was available for parents / carers, childcare providers, and employers.

With regard to the next steps the Council would continue to assess sufficiency of places to ensure that parents / carers were able to access an early years funded place or a wraparound childcare place.

Work would continue with childcare providers and schools to either expand or create places in areas of where there is high demand.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

### **CAB/79/25 Annual Report of the Governing Body for the Learning & Skills Service**

Consideration was given to a report on the Annual Report of the Governing Body for the Learning & Skills Service.

The report provided an update on the work of the Learning and Skills Service in supporting residents, employers and the local community with learning opportunities during the 24/25 academic year. The report also demonstrated the ongoing success of the Governing Body as an advisory committee empowered by Cabinet to provide challenge, support and strategic oversight.

The report highlighted the following key areas:-

- Governance and management of the Service
- Overview of the Learning and Skills Service
- Performance of the Learning and Skills Service
- Youth Guarantee Trailblazer Programme

RESOLVED that the report be noted.