

COUNCIL

A meeting of Council was held on Wednesday 20 November 2024.

Present: The Worshipful the Mayor (Cllr John Gardner), Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Stefan Barnes, Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Michelle Bendelow, Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Clare Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Diane Clarke OBE, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Nathan Gale, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Mohammed Mazi, Cllr Jack Miller, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Paul Rowling, Cllr Vanessa Sewell, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Emily Tate, Cllr Hilary Vickers, Cllr Marcus Vickers, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Alan Watson, Cllr Sally Ann Watson, Cllr Paul Weston, Cllr Katie Weston and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

Officers: Mike Greene (CE), Ged Morton, Julie Butcher, Jonathan Nertney, Peter Bell (CS), Garry Cummings (DCE&F, T&P), Reuben Kench (DoCS,E&C), Carolyn Nice (A,H&W), Majella McCarthy (ChS).

Also in attendance: Members of the Public.

Apologies: Cllr Dan Fagan, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Laura Tunney and Cllr Jim Taylor.

COU/144/24 Welcome and Evacuation Procedure

The Worshipful the Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the arrangements for the meeting.

COU/145/24 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

COU/146/24 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2024.

A correction to the minutes was moved by Cllr Tony Riordan and agreed by Council as follows:-

Members Question Time, page 19, fifth paragraph, after the words £300k for the Hotel include the words:-

“plus a £200k insurance payout,”

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2024 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

COU/147/24 Public Question Time

The Worshipful the Mayor informed the meeting that there were no Public Questions.

COU/148/24 Appointments to Committees and Joint Bodies for 2023/27

Consideration was given to a report on appointments to vacancies on Council committees, boards, panels and joint bodies in accordance with the wishes of the Conservative Group, which was entitled to the seats under political proportionality requirements.

RESOLVED that the following appointments be made:-

Audit and Governance Committee - Cllr Mohammed Mazi
Appointments Panel - Cllr Mohammed Mazi
Corporate Parenting Board - Cllr Jack Miller
Members' Advisory Panel - Cllr Jack Miller
Adults Social Care and Health Select Committee - Cllr Jack Miller
Statutory Licensing Committee - Cllr Jason French
General Licensing - Cllr John Coulson
River Tees Port Health Authority - Cllr Mohammed Mazi
Joint Tees Valley Health Scrutiny - Cllr Jack Miller

COU/149/24 The Stockton-on-Tees Plan 2024-2028

Consideration was given to a report that provided Council with the final draft of the Stockton-on-Tees Plan 2024-2028.

Cabinet approved the draft Stockton-on-Tees Plan for stakeholder consultation in October 2024 and a period of consultation took place from 18th October until the 4th November 2024. The Plan was also be considered by Executive Scrutiny Committee on 19th November 2024.

The Stockton-on-Tees Plan had been developed to reflect the drivers and priorities for the Council, our partners and most importantly communities.

A high-level analysis of data had been carried out to give a picture of performance and to set a baseline.

The voice of communities had also informed the development of a draft Vision for the Borough:

Stockton-on-Tees is home – a warm and friendly place, where we welcome others and come together as a single community. We are a diverse and inspiring Borough, culturally rich and with confidence in a future that we can all share and be proud of. At the economic heart of Tees Valley, we are a dynamic, safe and healthy place, where everyone can grow and succeed. We work together to reduce inequalities and remove barriers to opportunity. We are Team Stockton-on-Tees.

Five priority areas were proposed as the focus of our activity to turn the vision into reality. These were:

- The best start in life to achieve big ambitions
- Healthy and Resilient Communities
- A Great Place to Live, Work and Visit
- An Inclusive Economy
- A Sustainable Council

Further detail on each of these priorities was attached to the report.

There was wide engagement with communities and Elected Members in developing the draft plan. A formal consultation on the draft plan was used to gather any final views ahead of Council approval. The consultation was live from the 18th October until the 4th November 2024 and no responses were received.

It was noted that the comments made by the Executive Scrutiny Committee held on 19 November 2024 would be noted/actioned by officers.

RESOLVED that the Stockton-on-Tees Plan (as attached at Appendix 1 of the report) be approved.

COU/150/24 Powering Our Future - Prudential Borrowing Requirements

Consideration was given to a report that sought approval for prudential borrowing to enable delivery of transformation projects approved by Cabinet on 17th October 2024. The requirement of £4.3m of prudential borrowing for the acquisition of food and recycling waste receptacles, green waste bins, site preparation costs for a Waste Transfer Station and resurfacing of Wellington Square car park.

The Powering our Future Update report to Cabinet on 17th October 2024 outlined a number of service changes through the Transformation Mission. The report to Cabinet was included as an appendix which provides more detail on each of the proposals.

Upfront investment was required to enable some of these service changes and these are detailed below:-

- a) Green Waste – a one-off capital cost of £1,000,000 to purchase 40,000 green waste bins
- b) Waste Transfer Station – site preparation costs of £1,100,000
- c) New Waste Receptacles - £1,200,000
- d) Car Parking – Resurface Wellington Square - £1,000,000

The total investment required was £4.3m. If the Council were to fund these costs upfront, and negate the need for borrowing, this would effectively increase the in-year financial pressure which would increase the need to utilise earmarked reserves. Alternatively the costs could be funded by prudential borrowing, allowing the cost to be spread over a longer period. This allowed the budget savings to be realised straight away, contributing towards the Council's MTFP. It was therefore recommended that prudential borrowing be used.

The costs of prudential borrowing would be funded by the savings or new income generated from the service changes. This had been factored into the financial implications included within the Cabinet report.

The prudential borrowing repayments and the repayment terms were summarised in a table within the report.

Moved by Councillor Bob Cook, seconded by Councillor Lisa Evans:-

“Approve £4.3m prudential borrowing for the acquisition of food and recycling waste receptacles, green waste bins, site preparation costs for a Waste Transfer Station and resurfacing of Wellington Square car park.”

Moved by Councillor Tony Riordan, seconded by Councillor Niall Innes that the substantive motion be amended as follows:-

“1. Approve the use of £4.3m from the earmarked reserves and unused borrowing approvals in the capital programme, for the acquisition of food and recycling waste receptacles, green waste bins, site preparation costs for a Waste Transfer Station and resurfacing of Wellington Square car park.

2. £3.3m in the earmarked reserves to be utilised for the acquisition of food and recycling waste receptacles, green waste bins and site preparation costs for a Waste Transfer Station. £1m to be utilised from the unused borrowing approvals in the capital programme, Reshaping our Town Centres, for the resurfacing of Wellington Street Car Park”

At this point and in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.65 Councillor Niall Innes requested that a recorded vote be taken; which was supported by at least a quarter of the members present:-

Members in favour of the amendment:-

Cllr Diane Clarke OBE, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Jason French, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Mohammed Mazi, Cllr Jack Miller, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Vanessa Sewell, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Emily Tate, Cllr Hilary Vickers, Cllr Marcus Vickers, Cllr Alan Watson and Cllr Sally Ann Watson.

Members against the amendment:-

Cllr Stefan Barnes, Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Michelle Bendelow, Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Clare Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Nathan Gale, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr Paul Rowling, Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Paul Weston, Cllr Katie Weston and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

Abstentions:- Cllr Ian Dalgarno and Cllr Mick Moore.

22 for the amendment

26 against the amendment
2 abstentions

The amendment was not carried.

Members then considered the substantive motion.

Cllr Hall requested a recorded vote on the substantive motion which was supported by at least a quarter of the members present.

Members in favour of the substantive motion:-

Cllr Stefan Barnes, Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Michelle Bendelow, Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Clare Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Nathan Gale, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr Paul Rowling, Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Paul Weston, Cllr Katie Weston and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

Members against the substantive motion:-

Cllr Diane Clarke OBE, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Jason French, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Mohammed Mazi, Cllr Jack Miller, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Vanessa Sewell, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Emily Tate, Cllr Hilary Vickers, Cllr Marcus Vickers, Cllr Alan Watson and Cllr Sally Ann Watson.

Abstentions:- None

28 for the substantive motion
22 against the substantive motion
0 abstentions

The substantive motion was carried.

RESOLVED that £4.3m prudential borrowing be approved for the acquisition of food and recycling waste receptacles, green waste bins, site preparation costs for a Waste Transfer Station and resurfacing of Wellington Square car park.

COU/151/24 Members' Question Time

Member Question submitted by Cllr Ted Strike for response by the Leader of the Council (Cllr Bob Cook):-

“Can the Cabinet Member advise me how many buildings SBC own or rent in the Borough?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“Details on land and property owned by the Council can be found on the Council’s website, obviously this will change from time to time, officers will send you the link to

the page (Land and property owned by the Council - Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council) Whilst some assets will be individual buildings, many will be a collection of buildings under a single asset name, for example, a School.”

Member Question submitted by Cllr Lynn Hall for response by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport (Cllr Clare Besford):-

“Why did the Cabinet hold the September 'drop- in' session reported in the Leader's Blog, by the Strategic Waste Management Team about waste and recycling behind closed doors?

All Councillors need to be involved in the policy making and implementation as we move to a new waste collection model. How can you achieve this without our input? We were told it was to discuss the key milestones for the service plan and delivery as it will affect our residents or is it yet another policy implemented without consultation.”

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport responded with:-

“Thank you Cllr Hall, I am able to advise that Cabinet did not hold the drop-in session behind closed doors. The originally scheduled drop-in session was postponed and an email was sent to all Members on Wednesday 28th August. The rescheduled session took place on 1st October and you were present at that session.

Cllr Hall’s question calls for all parties to be involved in policy making around waste collection. As Cllr Hall is aware, the proposed waste collection model, based on weekly collection of recyclables and fortnightly collection of residual waste, was recommended by the cross-party Place Select Committee review of Domestic Waste and Recycling after a thorough and detailed investigation of the issues and options involved. So members have been involved. We are proud of the fact that work on this complex issue, that affects every household, was developed with members from all political groups and at the Select Committee that made the recommendations and received unanimous support.”

Cllr Lynn Hall asked the following supplementary question:-

“Do you really think green waste figures will be the same next year as they are this year?”

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport responded with:-

“Green waste will be very different next year as we are introducing it as a chargeable service over 36 weeks in-line with the CIFA guidelines.”

Member Question submitted by Cllr Lynn Hall for response by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (Cllr Lisa Evans):-

“Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that Safeguarding training is essential for senior staff as well as front line staff and members and is she assured the systems are robust and fit for purpose?”

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People responded with:-

“I would encourage all senior staff, front line staff and members to complete Safeguarding training.

The Adults & Children Safeguarding Partner Organisations across Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees actively support the ‘Think Family’ approach and are committed to the continuous learning and development of all staff and volunteers working with vulnerable people: adults, children, young people and families.

From the 1st April 2024, the e-learning that is available to everyone via the Safeguarding Partnerships has been updated. All courses are currently free of charge for staff and volunteers working within the Tees area in Statutory, Voluntary or Not for Profit Organisations. Commissioned Care Providers, Nurseries, Academies, and Independent Schools are not considered as Private / For Profit organisations and can access the e-learning free of charge.

In quarter 1 of 2024, there have been 422 registrations recorded for Safeguarding training from Stockton Council.

The system to facilitate the training is robust and fit for purpose. The Safeguarding Partnerships regularly review the training that is provided.”

Cllr Lynn Hall asked the following supplementary question:-

“Do all those taking the training know who the Lead Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is and is his number readily available? Is confidentiality followed to the letter?”

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People responded with:

“Yes.”

Member Question submitted by Cllr Niall Innes for response by the Leader of the Council (Cllr Bob Cook):-

“Can the leader inform me how many staff the Local Authority employ that deal with internal recruitment processes?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“Firstly, it’s important to clarify that we do not have staff whose sole responsibility is internal recruitment. The task of filling internal vacancies is handled collectively by various members of our team. This includes our HR team within Corporate Services and staff at Xentrall Shared Services, who support both internal and external recruitment activities for multiple councils and educational establishments. Managers across different levels also play a significant role in internal recruitment processes.”

Cllr Niall Innes asked the following supplementary question:-

“Given that there are internal individuals who have oversight of those different things, can the Leader clarify why as detailed in an FOI request received from the Council that since 2021 this Council has spent £15.8m on recruiting agencies? Does the Leader agree that this proves incompetence of this Labour led Council?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“I’m not sure if that figure is right but we do obviously spend money on external recruitment when we are looking for the likes of a Chief Executive or Director of a Service because we obviously want to find the best people available. Most public sector services use the same process. This is the best way of getting the best people for the people of Stockton. We obviously don’t spend any money on internal recruitment apart of officers time within the Council.”

Member Question submitted by Cllr Ted Strike for response by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing (Cllr Nigel Cooke):-

“SBC purchased Debenhams without having a survey carried out. Has a surveyed been carried out since the purchase and if so do it show any significant work that needs carrying out, if so how much? If a survey hasn't been carried out will one be carried out in the foreseeable future?”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

“The High Street portion of the former Debenhams store (150-152 High Street) was made available for acquisition through auction in 2023, with a limited information pack on the building issued by the seller at the time. Whilst the building was acquired outside of an auction process, the timescales involved in securing the building and approach taken by the seller meant that there wasn’t opportunity to undertake any surveys of the building prior to acquisition, beyond the information offered by the seller at the time. The power, intruder alarm and fire alarm controls for the entire building are located in the front half of the former Debenhams meaning that control of the front portion of the building was critical for any occupation and indeed safe access to the rear portion.

Since acquisition the Council has undertaken measured surveys of the entire building, Mechanical and Electrical Surveys and an Asbestos Survey. Surveys have revealed that there are some historic areas of water ingress that will need to be addressed, with suitable options for mitigation/repair being assessed. The nature of any future work to the building would depend on the future use and as such, there are no significant works identified to be undertaken at this stage. The Council is in advanced negotiations with a potential tenant for the rear portion of the ground floor of the building, with the exact nature and specification of works to enable reuse of the space being assessed as part of the process.”

Cllr Ted Strike asked the following supplementary question:-

“Was the survey carried out by independent surveyors or by Council employees and is there a cost figure for it?”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

“I haven’t got the cost of that work with me tonight but I can let Cllr Strike know that and I can’t verify who exactly did the survey but I am assured that it was a proper and reasonably decision that we took to acquire the property.”

Member Question submitted by Cllr Marcus Vickers for response by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport (Cllr Clare Besford):-

“What is SBCs definition or understanding of 'traffic calming measures'?”

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport responded with:-

“As set out in Government Guidance Local Transport Note 1/07 Traffic calming is a useful way of controlling drivers' speeds where speeds are either excessive and/or inappropriate for the type and use made of a road. Justification for installing traffic calming is often based on improving safety by reducing accidents. Traffic calming measures have evolved from focusing solely on physical highway engineering solutions to also include changing driver attitudes and perceptions of appropriate speeds. This can be achieved through streetscape modifications that create a sense of place and awareness of street activities, as well as driver education, awareness, and enforcement campaigns.”

Cllr Marcus Vickers asked the following supplementary question:-

“A petition with over 1000 signatures calling for traffic calming measures was delivered to this Council so can I ask when will this Council listen to local residents?”

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport responded with:-

“As a local Councillor it is a great job that you have managed to get so many signatures on that petition and I believe that you have had conversations with officers as to why that petition wasn't accepted. I believe that recent meetings with the Parish Council have been fruitful and as I referenced in my original answer decisions around traffic calming measures are based on concerns and accidents and therefore one of the reasons why we have our Community Participation Budget and our Ward Transport Budget is to enable Councillors invest their own budget to introduce traffic calming measures and I'm pleased that you have been able to find a solution working with the Parish Council.”

Member Question submitted by Cllr Jack Miller for response by the Leader of the Council (Cllr Bob Cook):-

“Can the Leader of the Council inform me of what community consultation took place to gain residents views on the proposed changes to bin collections?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“In 2023, National Government announced changes to the waste and recycling that Councils must collect. These set out the need to collect weekly food waste and the requirement to offer garden waste collection. These formed the basis of a review of waste and recycling within Stockton Borough, undertaken by the Place Select Committee.

The proposed changes to bin collections in Stockton are based on the recommendations of the Place Select Committee. These were set out in detail in January 2024. The Council provided a full description of what was being proposed through local media and social media. The Gazette covered it extensively and invited the public to comment. The Council covered it as a lead story in the My Council e-newsletter and in the March edition of Stockton News, which is distributed to homes across the Borough. In both our print media and online media we encouraged

residents to comment. Facebook alone reached nearly 4000 readers and there were lots of comments and reactions.

Responses were understandably mixed, but included those who were frustrated by the current low levels of recycling and asked why it had taken so long to achieve what was common in other parts of the Country. There were several people who welcomed the move to weekly collection of recycling because they typically have enough to fill the white bag before the end of the second week and don't need their wheeled 'residual waste' bin collecting every week.

There were also people who felt their wheeled bin would be full after a week and would overflow before it was collected if we moves to fortnightly collection. A number of people complained about the white bags, suggesting that they blow away or their contents is spilled when its windy. Some suggested an additional wheeled bin for recycling would be better. Other people complained about the space taken up by large wheeled bins, especially for those with small front gardens or on terraced streets.

Taking account of the feedback from all sources and the independent analysis of the national team advising Councils on waste and recycling, Cabinet deliberated over the best solution for the different containers. Cabinet also had to factor in costs and the requirements for collection and sorting of waste.

The introduction of a heavier weight in the recycling bags and the retention of weekly collections in back alleys for properties that can't put their bins out in front of their houses, are examples of how the Council has responded to feedback.

Recognising the possibility that residents may be confused or need assistance with the move to a new collection model, the Cabinet agreed to allocate resources for a small team of staff to go door to door to offer advice in the months leading up to the changes.

Ultimately, Stockton Council is implementing these changes to waste and recycling in order to increase recycling rates and save money. The cost for disposing of our rubbish if our recycling levels remain as low as they are, will be millions of pounds, in addition to the cost to the environment. The Council is trying to find the right balance."

Cllr Jack Miller asked the following supplementary question:-

"During our recent successful by-election in Fairfield residents shared our dismay that this Labour led Council failure to deliver services that they work so hard for. Why is this Labour led Council so adverse to listening to the views of its residents? Is it because it doesn't trust residents or they don't trust they will give them the right answer?"

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

"We do listen to residents and we always have done. There are many views on waste collection. We will always try and listen to residents who have got an view on recycling."

Member Question submitted by Cllr Barry Woodhouse for response by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport (Cllr Clare Besford):-

“On our regular ward walkabouts we inspected a number of roads in Billingham Central which were resurfaced this year using microasphalt as a trial. What was the outcome and will we be using microasphalt resurfacing more in the future?”

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport responded with:-

“Our micro asphalt trial programme was completed during September 2024 and consisted of resurfacing fourteen residential roads. The material is a cold applied mix, and as such roads can be reopened to traffic quickly, it is far more cost effective when compared to other materials and more environmentally friendly.

Initial feedback has been positive, although a couple of lessons learned have emerged during the process. A more detailed review is being conducted, and its highly likely that this material will form part of the annual highway maintenance programme moving forward.”

Cllr Barry Woodhouse asked the following supplementary question:-

“Given the shortfall in the highways budget caused by the previous governments underfunding as outlined by Cllr Ray Godwin in his question on 26 July 2023 estimated £1.6m annually, can you inform the Council of any cost savings?”

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport responded with:-

“There have been cost savings of around about £200k. This has allowed us to resurface more roads across the Borough. In addition there are cost savings that come from actual highway inspections and re-active resurfacing and repairs. I'm hopeful the review will be completed soon and we will be able to announce a resurfacing programme for the next financial year.”

Member Question submitted by Cllr Paul Rowling for response by the Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety (Cllr Norma Stephenson):-

“What work is ongoing with our partner agencies to target the illegal use of off-road bikes?”

The Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety responded with:-

“The use of illegal off-road motorbikes within our communities is understandable a great concern for many residents in Stockton on Tees. Not only for the inherit risk through dangerous riding but also the perception and fear of crime and ASB in causes to many residents.

As all Members are aware, the responsibility of directly tackling these types of issues sit with Cleveland Police who have a range of powers to do just that. That said, we are also fully aware of our partnership obligations to support Cleveland Police in their efforts under Operation Endurance. So far this year around 40 bikes have been seized across Stockton on Tees by Cleveland Police, thanks to the efforts of their officers, partners and reporting by our communities.

We provide a significant amount of information and intelligence, obtained through our Civic Enforcement Officers on patrol and our network of CCTV cameras around the borough. Information on riders, locations which bikes are stored and how bikes are sold for example is shared on a daily basis which allows enforcement action to be taken. We are also using our own powers in relation to Trading Standards to disrupt the illegal sale of off-road bikes and also ensuring the sale of fuel, especially underage sales, is investigated and rigorously dealt with.

We adopt a problem solving approach with our partners in the Safer Stockton Partnership supporting with measures such as education in schools through to additional measures in our communities such gates and barriers in our parks and open spaces. We have also adopted more innovative solutions to tackle this issue such as the use of drones to assist in the gathering of intelligence. These measures recently led to the seizure of two off-road bikes in the Thornaby area as part of Operation Endurance.

I would encourage all Members to make sure we continue to share information and intelligence with Cleveland Police to ensure all this great work can continue. Together we can reduce the issues caused by off-road bikes, but it requires a collective effort from everyone impacted by this blight.”

Cllr Paul Rowling asked the following supplementary question:-

“Will the Cabinet Member agree with me for too long residents across this Borough and across this country have had to live with these bikes and will she pledge to this Council to work closely with Thirteen, MP’s, the PCC Matt Storey to speak to government and ask them to bring forward as quickly as possible the new police powers promised to deal with off-road bikes in the governments 2024 manifesto?”

The Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety responded with:-

“We already work with Thirteen as they attend briefing meetings with the police and the Council and they do already have their own ASB team. They investigate any properties where there is ASB and there is a threat of eviction. I will agree with you and I have already spoken to the Home Secretary and the PCC and he is pushing the government as hard as possible so hopefully we will see some progress in the very near future.”

COU/152/24 Forward Plan and Leader’s Statement

The Leader of the Council gave his Forward Plan and Leaders Statement.

Council last met on 18 September. Since then Cabinet had met on 17 October and again on 14 November when and considered the following matters:

- Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Annual Complaints Report
- Powering Our Future
- The Stockton-on-Tees Plan 2024-2028
- 'Going for Gold Family Fun Day'
- Memorandum of Understanding between Stockton on Tees Borough Council and Teesside University

- Procurement Plan / Higher Value Contracts
- Civil Penalty Policy
- Local Accounts for Adults, Health and Wellbeing
- Care & Health Winter Planning Update Oct 2024

Looking forward, the Cabinet was scheduled to meet on 12 December and then on 16 January. Some of the topics that may be coming forward to Cabinet included:

- MTFP Update
- Learning and Skills Governing Body Annual Report
- Sycamores Re-development
- Procurement Plan / Higher Value Contracts
- SIRF and Events Look Back
- Gambling Policy
- School Investment Strategy

The next Council meeting would be on 22 January 2025. Until then, the Leader of the Council wished all Members all the very best for the upcoming festive season. Stockton Sparkles event would start on 28 November the launch from 5pm with an evening full of live music and entertainment, hot food and drinks, and the moment everyone has been waiting for, the Christmas light switch-on.