

CABINET

A meeting of Cabinet was held on Thursday 16 January 2025.

Present: Cllr Robert Cook (Leader), Cllr Pauline Beall (Cabinet Member), Cllr Lisa Evans (Cabinet Member), Cllr Clare Besford (Cabinet Member) and Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE (Cabinet Member).

Officers: Mike Greene (CE), Garry Cummings (DCE&F, T&P), Reuben Kench, Tara Connor (CS,E&C), (DoAH&W), Ged Morton, Julie Butcher, Kirsty Grundy, Peter Bell (CS), Carolyn Nice, Leanne Maloney-Kelly (A,H&W), Tracey Carter, Iain Robinson (IG&D), Majella McCarthy, Eddie Huntington (C&YP).

Also in attendance: Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Lynn Hall and Cllr Sylvia Walmsley

Apologies: Cllr Nigel Cooke (Cabinet Member) and Cllr Steve Nelson (Cabinet Member).

CAB/78/24 Evacuation Procedure

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

CAB/79/24 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

CAB/80/24 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2024.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2024 be approved.

CAB/81/24 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:-

Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board – 11 September 2024
Safer Stockton Partnership – 2 October 2024

RESOLVED that the minutes be received.

CAB/82/24 Regeneration Powering our Future

Consideration was given to a report that set out proposals to refresh the Council's Regeneration Mission, with a focus on 'Place Making' that aligns with our Stockton-on-Tees Plan priorities for:

- A great place to live, work and visit
- An inclusive economy.

The Regeneration Mission would provide a core foundation for the Council to achieve our place-based ambitions and will act as a framework for future delivery.

In January 2024, Cabinet agreed a draft Mission Statement and underpinning Missions for the Powering Our Future Programme, which set out a picture of success for the future of the Council. This included a Regeneration Mission, focused on driving economic growth to improve community prosperity and wellbeing.

Since that time, work had taken place to refine each of the Missions, to ensure they provide a foundation to deliver ambitions and priorities set out in the Stockton-on-Tees Plan (agreed by Council in November 2024). There had also been national policy changes and developments in major programmes of work, which were relevant to consider in relation to the Regeneration Mission.

It was therefore considered timely to review and re-set the Regeneration Mission, to position it with an increased focus on Place Making and achievement of Stockton-on-Tees Plan priorities. Achieving this Mission would incorporate significant, large-scale project and programme activity, which would be brought to Cabinet for decision making.

The Regeneration Mission was detailed within the report.

Success would be measured through a set of indicators that formed part of performance reporting for the Stockton-on-Tees Plan. This would include an emphasis on employment, skills and population rates, business growth and diversification of housing.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The proposals for the Regeneration Mission, set out in sections 4-7 of the report be agreed.
2. Future update reports be received as appropriate for major projects and programmes of work, and as part of Powering Our Future progress reporting.
3. Performance is reported through the Stockton-on-Tees Plan Performance Management Framework.

CAB/83/24 Levelling Up Fund Preston Park Museum & Grounds Enhancements

Consideration was given to a report that provided an update on progress improvements to Preston Park Museum and Grounds (PPMG) funded through Levelling Up Fund grant (LUF) and sought a decision to address financial pressures arising from mandatory unforeseen drainage works.

The programme of works as reported to Cabinet in March 2023 consisted of:-

- a. An extension exhibition and open store space at Preston Park Museum

- b. Improvement to the café and toilets (including demolition of current block)
- c. Enhancements to car parking
- d. Opportunities for an alternate use for the Aviary
- e. The creation of a new feature adjacent to the main entrance to celebrate and highlight the Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR) heritage and the original route through the Park

Following the most recent report to Cabinet on this matter in March 2023, work began on the Museum extension, exhibition space and open store along with increase to parking capacity in early 2024. The scheme was progressing on site with the car park works largely complete and completion and commissioning of the main build due in Spring 2025.

Work was also underway on the refurbishment of the existing café building which would see new toilets and changing places facility along with the demolition of the current toilet block complete by June 2025.

Initial design work had been undertaken on the reuse of the Aviary, opening it up at surface level, with new planting and seating to create a new space and point of interest. Designs had been developed for the demolition (subject to planning permission) of the dilapidated 1920's South Lodge gatehouse and replace it with a feature to celebrate and highlight the route of the former Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR). Enhancements to the central area (adjacent to and between the café and car park) would improve accessibility and movement of vehicles and pedestrians. This work had progressed at a slower pace in cognisance of the emerging budget issues described within the report.

As work had progressed on the Museum extension, it became apparent that the historic drainage infrastructure which serves the current museum building and to which the new build would connect, did not meet current environmental standards and legal requirements.

This discovery prompted a period of assessment and exploration of mitigating actions in regard to both temporary and permanent solutions along with discussion with Northumbrian Water Limited.

Given the legal requirement to be fully compliant with modern environmental regulations, it quickly became apparent that in order for the facility to be operable both in its current form and following the addition of the extension and exhibition space, an attenuation tank and the addition of a significant length of new drainage as well as a new connection into the nearby network was required and this work was added to the current construction contract.

The cost of the temporary drainage solution (which is currently in place) as well the permanent solution described above (currently under construction) amounts to £950,000.

The terms of the LUF funding committed the Council to the delivery of the exhibition space, café/toilets and parking, with the Aviary, S&DR feature commemoration and central area not forming part of the bid but emerging more latterly in the programme as opportunities to enhance the park and visitor experience.

The core LUF bid could be delivered within the project budget of £12.4m. However, despite some minor value engineering of elements within the exhibition space, the required additional drainage works had exhausted project contingency reserves and the budget reserved for the additional works to the Aviary, S&DR heritage feature and central area.

The budget of £12.4m was fully committed (including fees and contingency) to the exhibition space, car park, toilets and café only, which was in line with the originally envisaged scope of works in the LUF bid.

There were essentially two options for the PPMG programme of works.

Option 1 - Reduce the scope of project works, excluding the Aviary, a S&DR heritage feature and the central area, resulting in delivery of the exhibition space, car park, café and toilets works within existing budget;

Option 2 – Identify funding within the Council’s Medium Term Financial Plan to enable delivery of the full scope of the project, Aviary, a S&DR heritage feature and the central area

The cost of the works to the Aviary, S&DR heritage feature and central area as described at paragraph 4 of the report, as well as reinstatement of value engineered elements, was estimated at up to £950,000. These sums were estimates that would be confirmed at the point tenders are finalised, alongside provision for professional fees, contingency and provision for some value engineered items. The cost estimates were broken down within the report.

The sum for interventions was above the current approved funding envelope and as such up to £950,000 would need to be identified to deliver these interventions. It was recommended that funding be identified as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan report to Cabinet in February 2025.

If Cabinet were minded to approve option 2 to ensure the delivery of Aviary, S&DR heritage feature and central area along with reinstatement of value engineered elements, the final design and tender documentation could be prepared in order to achieve an accurate figure for delivery, with agreement of final contract sums and specification delegated to Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth in consultation with Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing.

If Members were minded to approve Option 1, it should be noted that there would remain a future liability to demolish the structurally unsound South Lodge which would need to be considered in the near future.

RESOLVED that the importance of the Aviary, Stockton & Darlington Railway heritage feature and central area to the Preston Park LUF enhancements be recognised and their delivery be supported, subject to funding being identified as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan report to Cabinet in February 2025.

**CAB/84/24 Additionally Resourced Provision in Mainstream Schools –
Outcome of EMS Consultation**

Consideration was given to a report on Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) in mainstream schools and the outcome of Enhanced Mainstream Schools (EMS) consultation.

In September 2024, a report was considered by Cabinet, for information only, on the consultation relating to increasing capacity in mainstream schools within Stockton-on-Tees, by transferring current Enhanced Mainstream Schools to Additionally Resourced Provision and SEN Units.

The Council had successfully submitted a revised Delivering Better Value (DBV) plan to DfE on 19 February 2024. This plan was formally agreed by Government and required the Council to fully mitigate the aggregated Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit by 2027/28, because if left unmitigated the number of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) was forecast to reach 2,564 by January 2027 (2,280 at time of submission) which would result in an unmitigated aggregated deficit of £34.8m by the end of 2027/28 compared with a current (end of 2023/2024) deficit of £3.8m.

The plan to reduce the deficit and provide long-term stability was based on eight mitigations, the most significant of which (in terms of deficit reduction and long-term sustainability) was to increase capacity in local mainstream primary and secondary schools thereby reducing the need for significantly more expensive independent special school and out of area special school placements.

There was a need to improve outcomes for children with special educational needs across the Borough and respond to the increasing demand for specialist support at the earliest opportunity. This fits with the Council's vision of providing earlier intervention to reduce demand for expensive placements which were often out of Borough and aligned with the overarching strategy of SEND locally and the priority areas in the Delivering Better Value Action Plan.

The Council had a statutory duty to ensure there was sufficient and suitable educational provision to meet the need of all its children and young people. Stockton-on-Tees had a significant shortfall in provision relating to pupils with Special Educational Needs. There was a need for a Cabinet decision to commit funding to increase the number of placements for children with SEND in the Borough.

The proposal to introduce a model of Additional Resourced Provisions and SEND Units would align with the Department for Education Guidance and allow for clear registration of the provision with benefits to schools and families. It would allow parents to request these schools in line with the duties in the Children and Families Act 2014 and would give parents additional choice of school placements, as opposed to current options of mainstream or special schools.

As a result of the pressure on places, more children were being allocated specialist places within the private sector, including the use of independent and alternative provision to support children not able to access a local special school place. This resulted in lengthy journeys for vulnerable children and pressure on families, whose children were educated away from their local communities. As well as having a significant impact on children's experiences, this was a costly solution; fees charged by the private sector were significantly higher than the costs related to children attending local schools. There were also associated transport costs for children attending schools outside the area which impacted on core revenue funding.

Local and national data demonstrated increasing demand for places for children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans was set to not only continue but expected to accelerate in line with national trends.

In the academic year 2023/2024, 126 children in Years 1-11 transferred from mainstream schools into special schools in and out of the Borough. In the academic year 2024/25 so far, this number was at 65 additional children. With a lack of special school places available, there was a requirement to respond locally to this. Work was also ongoing to upskill and support all mainstream schools in the Borough, however, the impact of this would not be immediately seen.

In September 2024, Cabinet agreed for consultation to take place with all stakeholders to determine that the proposal met the needs and priorities of children and families within the Borough and that school leaders agreed with and understood the proposals. The consultation also gave an opportunity for schools to express an interest in becoming an ARP / SEN Unit for the additional places required.

The consultation was largely positive, with over 251 responses and only 8.37% of those responses disagreeing with the proposals. Over 86% of the responses from parents and carers stated that they strongly agreed or agreed with the proposals.

The proposal was to realign existing EMS provision and transfer them into ARP and SEND Units, with 100 additional places in the areas of need that respond to the increase in demand. For example, to reduce the number of places available where there is a lower demand, i.e. sensory and physical, HI/VI and increase places for children with speech and language needs or autism spectrum disorder.

The establishment of ARPs and SEND Units ensured that where possible more children with an EHCP could be taught alongside, and within, a mainstream school environment. This had educational benefits for those children whilst also assisting the Council to better utilise the limited funding available through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) as it allowed those learners for whom the provision was appropriate to be placed in more cost-effective provision. The establishment of specialist resourced provision across the Borough further increased the range of SEND provision available to meet the needs of children, particularly those children with significant additional needs being able to access a mainstream curriculum.

A number of new schools had applied to be additionally resourced provisions. Some schools, who were EMS had asked to withdraw. This would not impact the children accessing the provision and the EMS would remain operational until all children left.

ARP/SEN Unit place costs plus appropriate top-up funding would be funded from the High Needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). This was a ring-fenced revenue grant received on an annual basis from the DfE.

The Council spent £1.9m per annum on EMS provisions for 209 places in Stockton schools, but by transferring these into SEN Units/ARPs and creating up to 100 additional places for children across the Borough, there would be an additional ongoing financial requirement of around £730,000 per year (assuming all placements are full) from High Needs funding in addition to current spend. Without the interventions there was a risk that the 100 children who would be placed in these ARPs would be placed in a an out of area agency placement with an average cost of £60,000 per annum resulting in a total annual cost of £6m.

These changes in provision would therefore deliver a cost avoidance of £5.27m per annum by 2026/27 and the cumulative impact of this was £13.61m by 2027-28 and was summarised within the report.

Some financial modelling based on the transport costs of children in EMS indicated that the creation of 100 new ARP places could add a pressure of around £225k to the Council's annual Community Transport budget. The exact cost would be determined by the placement of the ARPs and the location of the children enrolled and it was important to note that if the ARP places were not made available locally, then this cost pressure would be significantly higher as children would require transport out of area.

There was also an opportunity to deliver some capital works costing around £85,000 at Preston Primary School. This would ensure the creation of a SEND unit that was able to permanently accommodate 16 pupils. This would generate a cumulative saving of £1.59m by 2027-28.

A table within the report summarised the cumulative saving against the unmitigated DBV deficit position of £34.8m.

DfE had announced the High Needs Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations for 2025/26. The allocation for SBC was £44.2m (£40.78m in 2024/25). This was an increase of 7.4% and an additional £2.2m on the estimated funding in the DBV plan (This was a 3% increase as suggested by DfE).

The proposals described above, supported with the additional HN funding should give the Council a good basis on which to develop a more fit for purpose HN system in the Borough; one that was in-line with the DBV plan and that would enable the LA to mitigate the aggregated DSG deficit by 2027/28.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The recommendation to transfer Enhanced Mainstream Schools to ARP and SEN Units from September 2025 be supported.
2. An additional £730,000 p.a. be invested into these provisions from the High Needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.
3. £85,000 be allocated from the High Needs provision capital allocations for investment in the SEND Unit at Preston Primary School to increase capacity from 8 to 16 places in September 2025.

CAB/85/24 Review of the Statement of Principles for Gambling Premises in Stockton-on-Tees

Consideration was given to a report on the Review of the Statement of Principles for Gambling Premises in Stockton-on-Tees.

The Authority was required, by the Gambling Act 2005, to publish a Statement of Principles (policy) that it proposed to apply when exercising its functions under the Act. This policy must be published every three years.

Gambling was regulated in two ways, the Gambling Commission regulated the individuals who provide gambling, carrying out a fit and proper test on licensed operators. The Local Authority issue premise licences to those operators ensuring the premises where gambling was carried out meets legislation and guidance.

Gambling had changed in recent years, traditional methods such as betting shops were being replaced with online gambling. The Gambling Commission regulated online gambling. The number of betting shop premises had reduced by 17 over the past 9 years. The main source of statistical data on gambling was from the Gambling Commission website, further information was attached to the report.

As well as the Gambling Act 2005, the Gambling Commission Guidance for Local Authorities detailed how the local authority should exercise its functions when licensing premises for gambling.

There had been no legislative changes since 2022, as such there had been no material changes to the current policy. The policy has had a refresh regarding look, ease of use and updated information about the Borough, gambling participation and gambling harms, and a copy of the draft was made available to Members.

The draft policy was published for a four-week public consultation. The consultation included stakeholders such as the Gambling Commission, trade associations, licensees, children's services, local residents' groups, responsible authorities including police and public health, and all members. The consultation was also published on the Council website and a public notice was placed on the notice boards of all public libraries. No comments on the draft policy were received.

The Statutory Licensing Committee considered the draft policy at a hearing on 24 September 2024, no additional comments were received.

RESOLVED that the revised Statement of Principles for Gambling Premises in Stockton-on-Tees be agreed and come into effect on the 31 January 2025.

CAB/86/24 2024 Event Summary and 2025 Memorial Lighting Calendar

Consideration was given to a report that provides an overview of the Council's 2024 Events Programme, including commercial and community led events which had been delivered by third parties, including events on Council land. The report also provided details of the delivery of the Council's biggest event, Stockton International Riverside Festival (SIRF) which received very positive feedback in the independent market research, with 92% rating the whole experience positively and 94% feel that SIRF was a good use of Council resources.

In addition, the report provided the suggested calendar for memorial lighting for 2025.

The Borough's event programme continued to be popular with visitor numbers and satisfaction levels remained high over the past year. There had been a good mix of small, medium and large-scale events delivered across the six towns, and some new small scale town centre events included Yard Sessions, Sustainable Environment Fair and Going for Gold.

The Council's resources continued to be deployed across the Borough to enable local event organisers to deliver their own community focussed events which, although

supported, were delivered independently of the Council. Over 25 community and local events were delivered this year, many delivered on Council land and all receiving practical support from the Council, including specialist planning and safety advice, access to relevant Council services, and financial support for safety officers, road closures, signage and programming etc. This support was essential for communities to enable them to manage their own events and celebrations in a safe manner.

Part of our large-scale event programme continued to be temporarily impacted due to the ongoing major redevelopment work on Stockton's Riverside and High Street locations. The suspension of these events which included Stockton's Fireworks, Super Car Saturday and Stockton's Cycling Festival had been planned and communicated to Members and our communities.

The Council's Events Service was working with the Town Team, contributing to the design of the new riverside spaces and planning for the continued use of the existing riverside spaces, and developing a new large-scale programme of events in preparation for the opening of the site.

Internally, there continued to be a joined-up approach across Council teams in the delivery of our events programme and the effort and support provided from service teams including Enforcement, Highways, Legal, Communications, Media, CFYA and Design Services was acknowledged. The effectiveness of this joint working and ability to respond to unexpected challenges had been very evident this year, particularly in relation to the impact of adverse weather and changes to programme and overall delivery.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The success of events programme during 2024/25.
2. The memorial lighting calendar for 2025/26 be approved.