

Council

A meeting of Council was held on Wednesday 23rd July 2025.

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

Officers: Reuben Kench, Iain Robinson, Peter Bell, Julie Butcher and Ged Morton

Also in attendance: Members of the public.

Apologies: Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Dan Fagan, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Vanessa Sewell, Cllr Andrew Sherris and Cllr Laura Tunney

COU/35/25 Welcome and Evacuation Procedure

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

COU/36/25 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

COU/37/25 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 21 May 2025.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 May 2025 be confirmed and signed by the Worshipful the Mayor as a correct record.

COU/38/25 Minute's Silence Honorary Alderman Jeremy Atkinson

Members held a minute's silence as a mark of respect for Honorary Alderman Jeremy Atkinson who had recently passed away.

COU/39/25 Public Question Time

The following question was submitted by Janet Clancy for response by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing.

“What is the council doing to free up derelict properties? For example, two houses in Norton, 66 Norton Avenue and 68 Norton Avenue. They were converted into Council offices over 25 years ago and have been left empty.”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:

“The properties in question are owned by a local Registered Housing Provider, the Council is in contact with them to understand their plans for future use.

The Council works proactively with property owners to support owners return their properties to use. If appropriate we will also use our enforcement powers to ensure that properties are secured.

We will also proactively seek funding opportunities for monies which can be used to bring empty properties to use. For example, in the North Thornaby Area, Town Deal monies have been used by the Council to support a partnership with a local Registered Housing Provider (North Star) which has recently to date resulted in 5 properties being returned to occupation, 3 further properties have been purchased and are undergoing repair before occupation with a further 7 planned.

In addition, long-term empty properties are also subject to a Council Tax ‘empty homes premium’ (with the aim of encouraging owners to return to use).

The process of taking control of empty housing and properties and returning them to use without the agreement of the owners is fraught with difficulties as highlighted in the Place Select Committee report on Affordable Housing. Contained within that report was a recommendation for the Leader of the Council to write to central government to highlight the issues of properties being left empty and the obstacles to local authorities to take control and bring the properties back into use.

Janet Clancy asked the following supplementary question:-

“So how many homes across the Borough are empty?”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

“I will have to get back to you with that figure. It was in the Place Select Committee report.”

The following question was submitted by Nathan Sizer for response by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing:-

“What is happening with the derelict Newtown Social Club on Durham Road? The building is falling into further disrepair and stone cladding is now starting to fall off the building into the public footpath and road below. It needs demolished. Also a source of constant anti-social behaviours.”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

“Newtown Social Club is in private ownership. The Council is in contact with the owner to ensure that the building is secured.

A meeting has recently been held between the MP for Stockton North (Chris McDonald) Councillor Surtees, representative from the local resident’s association, the council and 3 local Registered Housing Providers. Each of the Registered Housing Providers have agreed to consider exploring whether they can potentially use the building or land for residential development. During this meeting, it was also emphasised that the building owner remains responsible for this building and is required to ensure it is secured. The property is a clear

anti-social behaviour hotspot and Councillor Surtees has been working hard to try and find a solution to the situation. A meeting is taking place now to on the larger issue of bringing the site back into use.”

Nathan Sizer asked the following supplementary question:-

“The talks have fallen through so where do we go from here?”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

“I will go back to officers and look at a way forward for this issue.”

The following question was submitted by Nathan Sizer for response by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing.

“What is gonna be done about all these HMO properties that are popping up all over Stockton? They are destroying the town and causing massive issues with anti-social behaviours etc, we need a cap on them.”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

“Not all HMOs require a planning approval to convert a property. Under planning legislation, a small HMO (defined as a dwelling which contains between 3-6 residents who share a main residence, and basic amenities generally do not require a planning permission from the Council.

With regard to the management of HMO's the Council operates a Mandatory HMO Licensing scheme for HMO's that are occupied by 5 or more persons. In addition, the Selective Licensing scheme which came into force in Nov 2024 which covers the Stockton Central, North Thornaby and Newtown areas will require 'smaller' HMO's along with all private rented properties in the area to also require a license.”

The following question was submitted by Nathan Sizer for response by the Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture.

“Will the Leader of the Council come to Newtown for a walk around and see the mess of the area? We are being ignored by the Council and we need investment in this area as we are seeing a big decline around here.”

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture responded with:-

“I'm sure the Leader of the Council as she has done on many occasion would be pleased to visit Newtown along with yourself. We are no strangers to Newtown area and we do regularly walk about the area with Councillor Surtees.

As noted in the previous answer the Council has implemented a Selective Licensing designation which covers the Newtown area. This designation came into force in November 2024 and requires all private rented properties within the designated area to apply for a license. This scheme has been implemented as the Council is committed to improving the condition and management of all private rented properties within the area.”

The Council's Care For Your Area team undertake regular work in Newtown. The Newtown area of the Borough has allocated a dedicated street cleansing barrow round covering the bypass road, Durham Road, A177 and Primrose Hill Park Monday-Friday 7am 14:30, and is also supported by a street cleansing operative in a small van. We also see the mechanical sweepers visiting this area on a 6-8 week programme to sweep the channels, although like other areas there are times when some areas would not get swept due to parked cars. Due to the type of housing in the area and the need for rear lane collections for refuse, gated rear lanes are swept weekly by a small sweeper following a total clearance following refuse collections on a Friday.

Following some concerns about anti-social behaviour and illegal activity within Primrose Hill Park, the Council and partner organisations recently carried out a crime prevention environmental assessment, which resulted in the Council along with Probation Services planning vegetation removal and cleansing works at key points in the park.

Newtown is subject to programmed highways safety inspections, to identify and have repaired any defects that create a significant risk or serious inconvenience to highway users. We have also recently undertaken some white lining works, refreshing junctions from Craigwell Crescent to Dundas Street, including the remarking of speed cushions as all the lining was faded.

This is a brief overview of some of the work ongoing and I hope you can see the Council's commitment to the Newtown Area."

The following question was submitted by John McDermottroe for response by the Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety .

"Will the Leader of the Council commit to formally writing to the Police and Crime Commissioner to request increased resources in Billingham, in response to growing public concern about balaclava-clad youths on off-road bikes and individuals prowling the streets in the early hours trying car doors? These issues have persisted for some time, yet residents feel little has been done to protect them or deter this criminal behaviour."

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

"Recent crime data shows that Billingham continues to experience lower overall crime rates compared to other areas in Stockton-on-Tees.

Nonetheless, reports of anti-social behaviour, including groups of balaclava-clad youths on off-road bikes and individuals trying car doors in the early hours, are a concern to the Council and something we are most certainly addressing with our partners including Cleveland Police.

The Council and partners are actively working to address these issues already. Neighbourhood policing teams are in place across Billingham's wards, engaging regularly with residents and hosting local drop-ins to set community policing priorities. Further to this regular proactive Civic Enforcement patrols are in place, complimented by the use CCTV in key areas. Specific partnership initiatives to tackle the illegal use of off-road bikes as part of Operation Endurance are also on going in the Billingham area.

At a strategic level, Stockton's Community Safety Partnership brings together Cleveland Police, the Council, and other partners to coordinate responses to crime and disorder. While the statistical data shows Billingham is not among the highest-crime areas in the Borough, the nature of the concerns being raised, particularly relating to youth disorder, off-road bike use, and vehicle-related opportunistic crime highlight the need for the greater attention we have in place to ensure Billingham remains a safe and welcoming place to live and work.

The Commissioner will be launching project Salace over the next two weeks that will be focussing hotspots around the Borough with issues that need to be dealt with. There will be regular patrols going on. There will be a meeting with the PCC the week after next and the two Billingham Central Councillors will be in attendance."

John McDermottroe asked the following supplementary question:-

"Given these issues have been on-going for months with no noticeable improvement will the Council also consider publishing a public action plan in co-ordination with Cleveland Police outlining specific steps to address anti-social behaviour to improve physical policing in Billingham."

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

"I think I have answered the bit about improved physical policing in Billingham and if you stay for the full meeting, you will hear a motion on off-road bikes and youths in balaclavas."

The following question was submitted by John McDermottroe for response by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing:-

"It has now been almost a year since 87 households were forced to leave Dawson House in Billingham. Residents were originally told they would be displaced for just 2 to 3 days — yet many remain in limbo, facing prolonged disruption and distress. This is simply unacceptable. Will Stockton Borough Council commit to writing to Thirteen Group to demand a clear update on the current situation specifically, when, or even if, residents will be allowed to return to their homes?"

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

"The Council has been in contact with Thirteen Group about the future of Dawson House following the identification of significant concerns regarding fire safety which prompted Thirteen Group to relocate tenants. I will follow up this conversation to ensure that tenants are given an update on the progress of the issues. In the meantime officers are working with Thirteen Group to look at the long-term future of Dawson House as part of the regeneration of the adjacent Billingham town centre."

John McDermottroe asked the following supplementary question:-

"Will the Council commit to publishing any correspondence or update they have received from Thirteen Group so the affected residents and the wider public can be kept properly informed so there is greater transparency and accountability around this on-going situation?"

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

"I have got a statement from Thirteen Group that I will read out.

"We have permanently rehoused 82 of the 86 customers who required rehousing (3 properties were empty) of the 89 properties in the block, all tenants have received home loss payments of £8,100. We had two leaseholders and have bought back these properties and rehoused where required.

Only 3 customers left to move into permanent homes.

1 customer who has been temporarily rehoused will be moving into their permanent home once repair work is completed.

1 customer is living with friends and family, with a property identified and now ready to move into and we are currently liaising with this customer.

1 customer remains in Dawson House, with a property accepted and will transfer once the repair work has been completed.

Where customers have moved into new homes, we have ensured that we provide an enhanced empty home offer, including carpets and white good if required by our customers.

In allocating homes, we have rehoused customers where they wished to move, with the vast majority remaining within the Billingham area.

We remain committed to working with the remaining 3 customers who require a permanent move and are pleased that all 3 know where their new home will be. We are committed to working closely with SBC officers on the future of the building."

And I of course will be helping as much as I can along with every other officer."

The following question was submitted by Terry Chapman for response by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport:-

“How long must the residents of Yarm be inconvenienced, and business viability undermined, until Stockton Council accepts that the abolition of the free hour parking on Yarm High Street was a big mistake?”

The Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport responded with:-

“Parking charges were introduced in Stockton and Yarm as part of the council’s empowering our future missions. When the decision was taken the cabinet was mindful that the council’s car parks need up to date machinery that accept modern payment methods, as well as regular maintenance. When the decision was taken, the cabinet at the time committed to a review after twelve months.

Upon becoming leader in April, Cllr Evans made it clear that it was one of her priorities to review the impact. At the last meeting of full council in May, a motion calling for a review was passed unanimously. Since then, we have worked at speed to get a review underway, and I can report that last Thursday cabinet a review into parking charges in Yarm and Stockton. This has happened sooner than the original twelve-month promise.

This will be a meaningful review that will give the opportunity for those impacted to give their views, this includes businesses, residents, high street users and local councillors. The leader and I have also pledged to meet with businesses that want to speak with us.

We will use data over a six-month period to track the impact, and I can also confirm that the first three months of data collection will be the last three months. Initial data collection does show an increase in footfall; however, I want to look at this in more detail as initial data can often be misleading.

Cabinet will consider the findings later this year and any potential changes will be made to fit in with the council’s budget setting process.

I welcome Cllr Innes, the shadow cabinet member for Resources and Transport for his willingness to work across party lines on this, and Cllr Coulson for his admission that this is not straightforward and that we could look at a compromise such as thirty minutes free.

We have heard the message from many residents and businesses on this issue and understand their concerns. We get it, and as I have set out, are already underway in reviewing the issue.”

Terry Chapman asked the following supplementary question:-

“I’m re-assured and pleased to hear at what was said there and my question is will the Council take into account the broader impacts on Yarm High Street in the fact that people meet there with their dogs. It is a shopping area yes but also serves many other purposes and I just want to emphasize that point so that we can all enjoy the delights of Yarm High Street.”

The Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport responded with:-

“Yes the town centres across the Borough are the beating heart of our local communities. I totally accept what you have said about people meeting up and other leisure activities. I think prior to Covid we took meeting up with people for granted. It is important we have places to do this. This will be a thorough review.”

The following question was submitted by Mo Waqas for response by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport:-

“Stockton’s Q2 2024/25 report shows a £6.6 m overspend covered by ‘Powering Our Future’ reserves. What is your Minimum Working Balance if grants fall 20 % and adult-care costs rise 10 %, per CIPFA resilience index, and what reserve trigger (<3 % of net spend?) forces you to issue a Section 114? Outline stage-gate scrutiny, external audit steps and how you’ll alert residents if a £5–10 m gap emerges mid-year?”

As Mo Waqas was not in attendance at the meeting he would receive the following written response:-

“Issuing a Section 114 notice is a decision for the Section 151 officer when they believe that expenditure will exceed all available resources, or that the Council is unable to set a balanced budget. External audit’s role is to assess the accuracy of the annual statement of accounts and comment upon the Council’s Value for Money arrangements.

The Council has very robust financial management arrangements in place. Thorough budgetary control processes frequently review performance against budget within year. Any factors that may indicate deviation from the approved budget, are identified as soon as possible and discussions undertaken to identify any potential corrective action where necessary. Budget managers, the finance team and senior leaders are all engaged throughout the process.

Medium Term Financial Plan updates are reported to members of Cabinet on a quarterly basis. This is then presented to members of the Executive Scrutiny Committee on the same frequency, to allow scrutiny of the content. The reports include an update on the projected financial position for the current financial year, which would highlight to members and residents any projected variance against the approved budget.”

The following question was submitted by Mo Waqas for response by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport:-

“Draft accounts reveal IFRS 16 lease debt and a capital plan reliant on PWLB borrowing plus £20 m capital-receipt flex. If the 2026/27 Fair Funding reset cuts retained business-rates 15 %, PWLB rates spike 100 bps, and IFRS 16 pushes usable reserves below CIPFA’s red-flag, what quantified threshold freezes all new capital, who authorises it, and how is the S25 robustness statement escalated to full Council within statutory deadlines?”

As Mo Waqas was not in attendance at the meeting he would receive the following written response:-

“The Section 25 statement is produced by the Council’s Section 151 Officer and included within the Medium-Term Financial Plan Report to Council when setting the annual budget and council tax precept.

Within the Section 25 statement, the Section 151 Officer reports to members of council on

- the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the budget calculations, and
- the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.

In preparing the statement, the Section 151 Officer will consider risks and any other factors that may impact upon the council’s budget; including cost drivers such as inflation, interest rate levels and demand.”

The following question was submitted by Paul Dolan for response by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport:-

“We heard at the last meeting that the purchase of Dunedin House was in excess of £3m can you advise how much was paid for the refurbishment, how it was funded and who the contractors were?”

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport responded with:-

“Dunedin House delivers a modern workspace that facilitates the Council’s ambition to provide a more collaborative and flexible work environment to support staff retention and recruitment. The building’s workspaces have been designed to create a productive, efficient and collaborate working environment that encourages creativity, innovation and a sense of

community. Each neighbourhood space is different in size and layout to meet the needs of the service areas located within them.

Dunedin House forms part of the Council's accommodation review and in February 2020, Cabinet approved the consolidation of its administration buildings from ten down to two. By moving most employees into one location, it allows the council to rationalise its office accommodation and reduce its ongoing maintenance and running costs. It also fits in with modern working practices that have come in since the Covid pandemic.

Dunedin House includes energy efficient lighting, heating and ventilation, and includes a solar panel scheme on the roof which is reducing the Council's energy costs for the building, whilst reducing its CO2 emissions.

The contractors for the delivery of the Council's new headquarters were Northeast based Esh Construction Limited, and the refurbishment costs were £8.15m, plus £2.1m for furniture, fittings and equipment, plus £1.25m for the delivery of a new Council Chamber that we are sat in this evening. By comparison, the original plan to build a new civic building on the waterfront was estimated to be £32.3m.

The refurbishment is funded by £5m prudential borrowing, £2.05m Revenue Funding, and £1.1m in Capital Receipts.

Dunedin House is located at the heart of the Central Stockton and North Thornaby Blueprint area and is situated in the Tees Valley Care and Healthy Innovations Zone. The Council's move to the Tees Valley Care and Health Innovation Zone has been a catalyst for investor confidence in the area, where we are seeing a reduction in vacancy rates, and an increase in businesses and other public sector associated businesses moving to the zone.

Paul Dolan asked the following supplementary question:-

"What selection process was used to approve and appoint the contractors?"

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport responded with:-

"As with every other public sector organisation in this country we have strict procurement and tendering processes and I'm happy to supply you with information on that."

The following question was submitted by Julie Dolan for response by the Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture:-

"In April 2026 the Council are to change the way our waste is collected with the introduction of kitchen waste food caddy and bags, outdoor waste food caddy, white recycling bags and blue recycling bags to be delivered to 90,000 households. In addition new bin wagons are required to accommodate the separated waste. What is the total cost of this change and how is it funded?"

Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture responded with:-

"The associated cost implications for the Simpler Recycling reforms were captured in the Powering Our Futures Report to Cabinet in October 2024. These forecast a reduction in budget envelope of c.£500k in 25/26 and c.£2.8m in 26/27. The performance against these budgets will be monitored and reported through the Council's regular budget monitoring processes, linking into the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)."

Julie Dolan asked the following supplementary question:-

"How would I get hold of that information?"

Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture responded with:-

"Some of that information will be in Council documents and I'm sure that officers can get that information to you on my behalf."

The following question was submitted by Julie Dolan for response by the Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture:-

“At the last meeting we heard that brown bins had brought in revenue of £800,000 across the Borough but what was the cost of the bins themselves, the additional bin wagons and staff to operate the wagons? Essentially how do the costs compare against the £800k received?”

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture responded with:-

“The Council were already delivering a Green Waste collection service and as such there aren’t additional staff and vehicle costs. At present the Council have spent approximately £475,000 on the new garden waste bins.”

The following question was submitted by Stephen Fryer for response by the Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture:-

“Stockton Globe is the quietest ATG operated venue in the UK. Was the decision for ATG to operate Stockton Globe as a "music focused arena" a barrier from bringing more performances to our town, or are the current performance levels acceptable?”

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture responded with:-

“Stockton Council is pleased to be able to collaborate with an international company of the scale and sophistication of ATG. The Council wouldn’t be able to attract or create the shows that ATG brings to Stockton and to the UK. We are keen to see a variety of types of entertainment at the Globe, reflecting the preferences of our diverse communities. The venue presents a broad programme including music, musical theatre, comedy and dance. The Council doesn’t place any restriction on the type of shows ATG select.

I have got some additional information from ATG have forwarded to me and I will take the opportunity to read that out:-

“Stockton Globe is part of the ATG portfolio and operates similarly to our other music focused venues in terms of programme levels and quality content.

Established, nearby competitors Newcastle City Hall and Hull Connexin Live (formerly Hull Bonus Arena) both typically deliver between 100 and 120 events annually, after many years of operation. The Globe benchmarks against these after just 3 full years’ operation.

The Globe has a big focus on the growth of non-ticketed functions and events and well as community and creative learning. Its core artistic programme however will always focus on quality content as opposed to number of shows.

Whilst it takes time to establish a venue, since opening the Globe has secured world class artists such as Queens of the Stone Age, Nick Cave, Robert Plant and Paloma Faith, with more artists soon to be announced.” Thank you.”

Stephen Fryer asked the following supplementary question:-

“We have been told continuously that the Globe will bring £18 million back into the local economy every year. I’m guessing that this figure comes from the 2017 document estimating that the social and economical impact of the Globe development proposals. Based on figures released this month. I believe that the money brought back into the local economy is currently about £3.5 million per year, far less than the £18 million per year we were promised, I’m happy to give you the figures if you want. How much do you believe is being brought back into the local economy by the Globe based on the current performance levels? and if it is more than £4 million can you please break down those figures and tell us how you arrived at those figures and if you are closer to the £3 or £4 million per year why were the projects of £18 million so far out?”

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture responded with:-

"The figures we have with regard to extra added value to the Tees Valley economy are as follows:-

"In 2024, the Tees Valley saw:

£475million generated by overnight visitors – up 1.3% on 2023, and 3.9% higher than 2019, before the covid-19 pandemic.

£906million from day visitors – up 5.4% on 2023, and 0.6% above 2019 levels.

23.4million visitor days and 20.4million individual visits, offering increases of 4.5% and 5.0% respectively on the previous year.

Tourism directly supported 10,035 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs, rising to 12,919 when indirect employment is included.

The food and drink sector provided a total of 4,758 FTE roles, up 3.1% from the previous year.

With the largest growth in Stockton for all sectors.

So I'm very pleased with performance of the Globe and that added value of visitors bring to our economy and extremely pleased with the jobs that have been created."

The following question was submitted by Stephen Fryer for response by the Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture:-

"Why have Stockton Borough Council not been open and transparent with residents, hiding the fact that we CAN put garden waste in the green bin? The SBC Website still states "From Tuesday 01 April 2025, if you need your garden waste to be collected you will need to pay a £40 subscription fee". "If you don't sign up to our new service you can either home compost your garden waste or take it for free to Haverton Hill Household Waste Recycling Centre"

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture responded with:-

"Stockton Council continues to promote recycling and to follow national Government guidance on waste and recycling services. We do not say that people cannot put their garden waste in their residual waste bin, but we do discourage them from doing so.

If residents put garden waste in the green bin it adds to the weight and cost of waste that is incinerated, ultimately costing local people more and releasing more greenhouse gas into the atmosphere.

It's great to see so many of our residents signing up for the new garden waste collection services. I think that shows that people want to help us recycle more, save money and do their bit for the environment. I have done all I can as the Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture to motivate as many people as possible to continue to recycle."

Stephen Fryer asked the following supplementary question:-

"The Council have not said that you can put your garden waste in the free bin. I'm all for recycling but you haven't been open and transparent. The law is very clear you have the legal right to a refund if you were misled about a product or service. Companies and organisations who are selling a product or service you should not keep information about that product or service hidden or obscured. The Citizens Advice website even if the seller sells by mistake it counts as misleading the service. So will SBC refund everyone who has paid the £40 fee for the brown bin service as it has been miss sold and if not why have SBC broke the law?"

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture responded with:-

“I will refer Mr Fryer back to my response to his first question. We do not state that people can not put their garden waste in their residual bin but we continue to discourage it. The brown bin service is a subscription service that people can chose or chose not to subscribe to.”

COU/40/25 Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies 2025/27

Consideration was given to a report that presented the following, for consideration:

- amendments to committees (Appendix 1 of the report)
- vacancies on outside bodies (Appendix 2 of the report)
- vacancies on vice chairs' positions (Appendix 3 of the report)

Appendix 1 of the report provided details of political groups' wishes, in line with their allocations under political proportionality regulations.

Appendices 2 and 3 of the report provided details of nominations received, to date, for outside bodies and vice chairs' positions.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The amendments to the committees, at Appendix 1 of the report be noted:-

Place Select Committee - Remove: Cllr Bob Cook Add: Cllr Steve Nelson
Children and Young People Select Committee - Remove: Cllr Stephen Richardson
Add: Cllr Jack Miller

2. The nominations at Appendix 2 of the report be approved:-

Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education (SACRE) - Cllr Clare Besford

3. The nominations, to Vice Chairs' positions, at Appendix 3 be approved:-

Community Safety Select Committee - Cllr Katie Weston
Place Select Committee - Cllr Steve Nelson

COU/41/25 Appointment of Acting Section 151 Officer (Chief Financial Officer)

Consideration was given to a report that sought Council's endorsement and confirmation of the interim arrangements for the statutory role of Section 151 Officer, following the recent retirement of the previous postholder. The decision is necessary to ensure compliance with legislation.

Under s151 of the Local Government Act 1972, every local authority shall make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and shall secure that one of their officers has responsibility for the administration of those affairs

The appointment of a Section 151 Officer was a statutory requirement and a non-executive function reserved to Full Council, as set out in the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000.

Following the retirement of Garry Cummings, Clare Harper, previously appointed as Deputy Section 151 Officer had continued to discharge the statutory responsibilities of

the role in accordance within the established internal delegations. While this continuity fits with the expectations of the Deputy role, it was considered appropriate for Full Council to formally endorse the interim arrangement.

To reflect the significance of the role and ensure consistency with the Council's management structure, the interim post would be styled Chief Financial Officer. The Acting Section 151 Officer would also hold delegated authority to appoint a Deputy Section 151 Officer, in line with statutory provisions and internal governance arrangements.

The Council's Appointments Panel would be requested to consider options for the permanent appointment and bring forward a recommendation to Full Council.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The retirement of Garry Cummings, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance, Transformation & Performance be noted and appreciation for his service be expressed.
2. The appointment of Clare Harper, Assistant Director of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer, as Acting Section 151 Officer, effective from the date of Mr. Cummings' retirement be endorsed and confirmed.
3. For the purposes of the Council's Constitution and associated schemes of delegation the following be agreed:
 - a. The Acting Section 151 Officer shall be granted the standing and authority equivalent to that of a Director in respect of all decision-making responsibilities;
 - b. The Acting Section 151 Officer shall be deemed to hold a Chief Officer position for the duration of the interim arrangement;
 - c. The Acting Section 151 Officer shall have delegated authority to appoint a Deputy Section 151 Officer, in accordance with statutory requirements and the Council's internal governance framework.
4. It be noted that the interim role will be styled Chief Financial Officer for the purposes of internal reporting, organisational communication and external engagement.
5. It be noted that the Council's Appointments Panel will consider and bring forward a recommendation to Full Council in due course regarding the permanent appointment to the Section 151 Officer role.

COU/42/25 Treasury Management Practices Update

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

Following the recent retirement of the Council's Section 151 Officer, the delegations for treasury management activities required updating.

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

Accordingly, the Council created and maintained, as the cornerstones for effective treasury management:-

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

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

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

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

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

- | | |
|--------|---|
| TMP 1 | Risk management |
| TMP 2 | Performance measurement |
| TMP 3 | Decision-making and analysis |
| TMP 4 | Approved instruments, methods and techniques |
| TMP 5 | Authority, clarity and segregation of responsibilities and dealing arrangements |
| TMP 6 | Reporting requirements and management information arrangements |
| TMP 7 | Budgeting, accounting and audit arrangements |
| TMP 8 | Cash and cash flow management |
| TMP 9 | Anti Money laundering |
| TMP 10 | Staff training and qualifications |
| TMP 11 | Use of external service providers |
| TMP 12 | Corporate governance |

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

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

COU/43/25 Motions to Council

The following motion was moved by Cllr Ross Patterson and seconded by Cllr Kevin Faulks:-

“The UK Government website states: ‘The historic counties are an important element of English traditions which support the identity and cultures of many of our local communities, giving people a sense of belonging, pride and community spirit. They continue to play an important part in the country’s sporting and cultural life as well as providing a reference point for local tourism and heritage. We should all seek to strengthen the role that they can play.’ Government has inserted a hologram of the historic counties inside the back cover of the blue coloured British Passport. Paragraph 3.47 of the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016 issued by the Department for Transport allows the signing of historic county boundaries on the highway network. However the requirement to install these has been placed on local authorities, but it is only optional.

The Borough of Stockton on Tees incorporates 6 towns, 3 north of the River Tees in the historic county of Durham and 3 south of the River Tees in the North Riding of Yorkshire. Each of these towns are seeing exciting developments to enhance and improve them. The Council has also taken a keen interest in the last decade to ensure that the Historic County boundary at the River Tees is marked on its highway network, as well as kindly offering guidance and advice to other local councils wishing to do the same. However, progress elsewhere is frustratingly slow, and we risk losing our heritage if nothing is done.

Therefore, please would the Leader of the Council write to the Deputy Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and request:

1. The Traffic Sign Regulations are amended to make it compulsory that Historic County boundary signs must be installed on all the following categories of roads on the Highway Network: motorways; dual carriageways / trunk roads; Category A, B and C roads, by the relevant highway’s authority, whether it is a local authority, Highways England, or the Department for Transport.
2. She visits the Borough of Stockton on Tees, to see the exciting developments which are enhancing and improving our 6 towns, and the work the Council has done in the last decade to mark the Historic County Boundary at the River Tees on its highway network, demonstrating why Stockton Borough Council is an outstanding forward thinking authority which also respects and preserves the heritage of our country.”

A vote took place and the motion was agreed.

The following motion was submitted by Cllr Niall Innes and seconded by Cllr Tony Riordan:-

“Council notes that:

Off Road Bikes are causing Havoc on the streets of Stockton.

The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 introduced several new tools and powers for use by councils and their partners to address anti-social behaviour (ASB) in their local areas. These tools, which replaced and streamlined a number of previous measures, were brought in as part of a government commitment to put victims at the centre of approaches to tackling ASB, focussing on the impact behaviour can have on both communities and individuals, particularly on the most vulnerable.

For the sake of this motion, Mechanically Propelled Vehicles (MPV's)" includes, but is not limited to:

Motorbikes (road going and off road) including mini "pee-wee" bikes Electrically propelled motor bikes

Scooters

Quad Bikes and mini quad bikes

Vehicles for use by a person with a mobility impairment and being used by someone with a mobility impairment would be exempt under the proposed motion.

Council believes that:

Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO) are vital tools available to local authorities that seek to tackle anti-social behaviour in public spaces, aiming to ensure everyone can use and enjoy these areas without experiencing nuisance or harm.

Residents in our borough deserve to know that their local council, which they pay handsomely towards, are doing everything they can to tackle the scourge of Off-Road Vehicles in our Borough.

PSPOs, used as part of a wider strategy and by working with key external stakeholders, allow local areas to counter unreasonable and persistent behaviour that affects the quality of life of its residents. They can send a clear message that certain behaviours will not be tolerated and help reassure residents that unreasonable conduct is being addressed.

The use of PSPOs have been successfully rolled out in Rochdale and Rossendale councils, using them to tackle Motorbikes (road going and off road) including mini "pee-wee" bikes Electrically propelled motor bikes Scooters, Quad Bikes and mini quad bikes.

PSPOs can have a powerful impact. Breaching a PSPO is a criminal offence subject to, up to a level three fine on prosecution (up to £1,000).

Council resolves:

Council requests that the Cabinet consider the introduction of a borough-wide Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) enforcing that MPV's are prohibited from being used on any publicly owned land in the borough, or on any other land without express or implied permission.

A person is prohibited from having a MPV in their possession but not being ridden when in a public space or on a highway or pavement, unless they can produce appropriate insurance for use of the MPV on a public highway. The only exception will be granted for persons wheeling a MPV to a clearly identified van or trailer for onwards transportation.”

A vote took place and the motion was agreed.

COU/44/25 Members' Question Time

The following question was submitted by Cllr Niall Innes for response by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing:-

“To ask the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing for a progress update on the investment works to Billingham following a recent press statement stating works have been further delayed.”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

“I refer Cllr Innes to the July cabinet report which sets out the significant progress made on the regeneration of Billingham Town Centre .

50. As reported to Cabinet in May 2025’ a signed funding agreement for the £20m Levelling Up Fund grant was received in April 2025. Since the last update to Cabinet, the final details of legal agreements between the Council and Evolve are being finalised to enact the decisions taken at Cabinet in June 2024 in regard to the acquisition of part of Queensway South, West Precinct and former Library site of the centre and the key principles of relocation of tenants and demolition to enable residential-led redevelopment alongside commercial investment by Evolve.

51. The approach presented to Cabinet in June 2024 saw the Council acquire part of Queensway South at vacant possession and then undertake demolition of the building. As drafting of legal agreements has progressed, the opportunity for Evolve to manage demolition of Queensway South prior to the partial disposal to the Council has been proposed. This approach will make for a more efficient demolition process as Evolve manage a single contractor on their land, as opposed to the more complex approach of the Council undertaking demolition and requiring access across Evolves land at different points.

52. This approach represents a deviation from the position previously reported to Cabinet and Cabinet are therefore asked to endorse this revised approach and allow for it to be reflected in drafting legal agreements that are already delegated by Cabinet in June 2024.

53. Feasibility work is also underway to explore options for repurposing the disused Council office, Wynyard House, as a public sector hub. The feasibility work has been funded through One Public Estate and is expected to conclude in autumn 2025.

54. The next stage of the project will be to develop plans for residential development on the cleared site, in line with the principles of the agreed masterplan. Options for securing a development partner for the West Precinct and former library and clinic site will be explored, including exploring the opportunity to broaden a partnership with Evolve to enable wider redevelopment, potentially incorporating, where appropriate Council assets within and adjacent to the town centre as a means of increasing investment, unlocking residential growth and safeguarding existing and traditional town centre uses. Discussion with other stakeholders in the vicinity of the town centre will also take place to explore additional opportunities to increase redevelopment potential in the area.”

Cllr Niall Innes asked the following supplementary question:-

“The basis for asking that question because it is not just me or the press asking but also residents, this scheme seems to be doing the same course as many other project SBC have been involved in whether it be the Globe going over budget and way over time, issues at

Preston Park £1 million extra, Riverside Road, all with a lack of foresight. There seems to be a growing trend of projects for SBC that have problems. The only project that hasn't had any delays is the Diagnostic Centre and that wasn't SBC had any responsibility for. Can the Cabinet Member agree with me and with the vast majority of residents in the Borough that this is just the same old from SBC, further delays with public money provided by the previous Conservative government and true to form wasted by Labour incompetence?"

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

"The answer is no."

The following question was submitted Councillor Jason French for response by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing.

"At full Council on the 21st of May 2025 the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing, following a question by a member seeking a comprehensive update regarding the programme of works, about demolition of the Golden Eagle, provided an update on the Golden Eagle at Thornaby, detailing that the demolition work would begin in June. On the 29th of June it was reported in the local media that the demolition process had been delayed until August.

Does the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing think it appropriate for members to discover the further delay for the start of the demolition works to the Golden Eagle via the local media?"

Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

"Apologies to Council that the progress on the demolition of the Golden Eagle has been fast moving and a full update was included in the POF report to Cabinet in July. In May we were still awaiting the tender responses for a demolition contractor. When these were received it became clear that a further cabinet decision was needed, and a report was added to the forward plan. This and a statutory demolition notice meant that the press picked up on the story in advance of the publication of the cabinet report which contains a full explanation. After seeing the tenders from the contractors and finding out the extent of the asbestos and finding out the shocking way that it had been installed it was clear that further funding was required to bring down the Golden Eagle. This has now been approved by Cabinet and the process forward is now to appoint a contractor and handing the site to them. They will then take charge of the site and work will begin to bring the building down."

Councillor Jason French asked the following supplementary question:-

"Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that the Labour Group approach briefing the press on key issues before briefing members has been a complete shambles and what action will he take to ensure this doesn't happen again?"

Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

"There are briefings scheduled on a regular basis, but the Conservative members never turn up."

Member Question submitted Councillor Tony Riordan for response by the Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety:-

"Stockton Borough Council is in receipt of the Asylum Dispersal Grant from Central Government. Can the Leader detail,

- How many Asylum Seekers are presently housed in the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees?
- How many of the Asylum Seekers are male, and how many are female?

- What were the numbers of Asylum Seekers housed in the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees for the years, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024?
- What was the amount of Government grant made payable to Stockton Borough Council, for the years, 2019,2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025?
- Does Stockton Borough Council financially contribute to the support of Asylum Seekers in the Borough, and if so, what is the value, for the years 2019, 2020, 2021. 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025?

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

"Thanks for this question, Cllr Riordan which requires 23 points of technical data. I will therefore provide this in a separate written response rather than reeling off all the detail.

However, in summary, I will remind members that the provision of support to asylum seekers is a statutory duty established by the previous government when they introduced the National Dispersal Scheme in 2022. The number of asylum seekers in Stockton has remained pretty static over the last few years and represents approximately 0.55% of our population. The costs of supporting and resettling asylum seekers is entirely covered by government grant.

Data not held before 2022 when the The National Dispersal scheme came into being and Government restrictions apply to the release of the gender and location of asylum seekers.

I can however give you the costs of the grant that we have received for asylum seekers which is as follows 2022/23 £229,000 23/24 £671,500 24/25 £1,702,870 25/26 £960.200."

Councillor Tony Riordan asked the following supplementary question:-

"You used the word static in your response but would you agree that in the year 2022/23 we received £229,000 and then in 24/25 we received over £1,702,870 in grant would indicate a rise rather than static numbers and further prior 2022 what was the Council's position in supporting asylum seekers? Was it an opt in or opt out?"

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

"I would have to check out those figures I can however explain that the rise isn't in relation to the number of asylum seekers in 2022 the Council received £250 for every asylum seeker that came into the Borough between then and now it has slowly risen, we now receive £1250 for every asylum seeker that comes into the Borough."

The following question was submitted Councillor Niall Innes for response by the Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety:-

"Stockton Borough Council has recently sought to recruit 2 x Support and Integration (Migration Support) Officers on a salary range of £31,067 - £32,654 per annum, and 1 x Service Development (Migration Support) Officer on a salary of £37,035 - £39,513 per annum. A Freedom of Information Request, and response, showed that the 3 roles are new.

Why does the Leader of the Council deem it necessary to recruit these roles?"

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

"As outlined in my response to the previous question, the support of asylum seekers and refugees is a statutory duty and when right to remain has been established this requires resource to effectively support and integrate them into our Borough and the communities to which they now belong. These posts are entirely funded by government grant."

Councillor Niall Innes asked the following supplementary question:-

"Isn't this just a case of SBC using the taxpayers' funds to fill roles regardless of whether it is grant money, it is still taxpayers money, that are so vague and non-descript it is not clear what role they are supposed to provide? The job descriptions are extremely vague, isn't this just

further proof that this Council's priorities are so far removed from priorities of the residents of this Borough?"

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

"The priorities of this Council are the same priorities of the government. We need to support asylum seekers, we need to move them on after they have had the right to remain, we need to support them in the community, we need to support them into work because once they get the right to remain they have the right to work and they can contribute to the town and the Borough as a whole."

The following question was submitted by Councillor Jack Miller for response by the Leader of the Council.

"At full Council on the 21st May the Council Leader responded to a question regarding a previously resolved motion (That the Leader of the Council engages with local stakeholders and meets with them alongside other Group Leaders to discuss what this Council can do to robustly support and protect young people of this Borough most at risk).

Following the publication of the Casey Report, and the humiliating U turn of the Labour Government to now undertake a National Inquiry into Grooming Gangs, will the leader reflect on her previous response and accept that dismissing concerns by members in the manner she did has eroded all confidence she may have had on leading on this most important of matters."

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

"As I explained previously, this Council already engages actively with local stakeholders on issues affecting children and young people, including those most at risk. That engagement takes place regularly through established multi-agency arrangements with our key public sector partners, including police, health, education and the voluntary sector.

What was unusual about the motion was its proposal that these engagements should include Group Leaders. There is no formal role for Group Leaders in those safeguarding discussions, and it would not normally be appropriate for political group representatives to attend those operational forums.

However, I did say previously—and I will repeat now—that if Group Leaders had particular suggestions in mind as to how such involvement might work, I would be happy to consider them and take that forward where appropriate. No such suggestions have been brought to my attention.

I am content that the work I and others are doing with our partners to address the challenges facing vulnerable young people is both serious and ongoing. If you or your Group have a specific issue or proposal in mind, I would encourage you to raise it—either directly with me, through your Group Leader, or with the relevant Cabinet Member.

I will reiterate that your Group have received several offers, not just on this subject, but on anything. I meet with Group Leaders on a regular basis. Your Group have always declined the offer. Furthermore, your shadow Cabinet, including yourself have had an offer to meet with Cabinet members. You raise this issue around children and young people and yet you sit here as the shadow cabinet member for children and young people. You may have been better taking up the opportunity of a meeting with the Cabinet member rather than trying to score cheap political points using vulnerable young people to do so.

I also do not see the Labour Government changes as either a U turn or humiliating. I always reflect on my responses, thank you. As you well know following the publication of the Casey Report, the government agreed to have a full national inquiry.

At the time of the motion to Council, this report wasn't published. What was published was the Jay report. My comments were based on this. This report was the result of a 7 year

investigation ending in 2022 when a conservative government was in power. I'm surprised you dare to ask me this question when at this time your government did not do a single thing to address the 20 proposals made by Alexis Jay.

We all have the power to reflect and change our minds.

I stand by my comments as Cabinet Member at that time based on the Jay inquiry.

Now that the Casey report has been published, more recommendations have come to light and I am confident that the current government will address the recommendations unlike the previous one."

Councillor Jack Miller asked the following supplementary question:-

"Baroness Casey concludes her 12 recommendations contained within the report, while there maybe further action arising from this audit the victims of child sexual exploitation in England and Wales deserve nothing less than full implementation of these 12 recommendations. Decisive leadership and a collective determination to fix past failings and build a strong approach to the future. The resolution agreed by this Council was clearly in-line with Baroness Casey's view but not yours or the Labour Group you lead. Will you do the right thing and step down allowing decisive leadership and a collective determination to fix past failings and build a strong approach for the future?"

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

"Councillor Miller I would gently suggest that you avoid politicising something so serious to the children. It is important we don't undermine confidence in our safeguarding partners by suggesting that concerns have been dismissed when in fact significant work is being done behind the scenes every day. If you real intention is to strengthen that work I would encourage you to come forward with constructive ideas. The safety of children should never be political scoring point. You will find if you read the report further which I'm sure you will have done, you will also not that there was a change of mind in that report by Baroness Casey and so we can have a change of mind of this Council and we can have a change of mind of government, I'm happy to reflect on past decisions but on this one I do not accept that I spoke wrongly and I stand by what I said at that time."

The following question was submitted Councillor Lynn Hall for response by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People:-

"Recruiting and retaining social workers is a significant financial challenge for this Labour Led Council. Difficulties in recruitment, coupled with the high costs associated with agency social workers.

Can the leader provide an update on the work undertaken with the academy to reduce the number of agency workers employed by Stockton Borough Council and what financial savings have been made because of this work?"

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

"At Stockton Borough Council, both Children's and Adults Services are committed to a sustainable and strategic approach to social work recruitment and retention. A key element of this strategy is the adoption of a "Grow Your Own" model, which has proven highly effective in building a resilient and skilled workforce. This approach encompasses multiple entry routes into the profession, including Apprenticeships, Step Up to Social Work, and traditional university pathways. By diversifying recruitment channels, we are not only broadening access to the profession but also ensuring a steady pipeline of talent aligned with our values and service needs.

Adult Services currently maintain minimal social work vacancies, a testament to the effectiveness of our recruitment and retention practices. Any vacancies that do arise are

addressed through established recruitment processes, ensuring continuity of care and service delivery. The stability in staffing allows the service to focus on quality improvement, professional development, and innovation in practice.

Children's Services are undergoing a strategic expansion in 2025/26, with a deliberate increase in the intake of social work students and Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs). This proactive measure supports long-term workforce sustainability and aligns with national recommendations from the Independent Review of Children's Social Care. Recognising the additional support required for early-career professionals, the Learning Academy has significantly strengthened its infrastructure by increasing the number of Senior Practitioners dedicated to mentoring and supervision.

Support for NQSWs is comprehensive and multi-faceted, including 1:1 mentoring and supervision, structured group learning sessions, targeted workshops on core practice areas and formal training aligned with the Knowledge and Skills Statements and Post-Qualifying Standards.

This robust support framework ensures that social workers are not only well-prepared for the demands of frontline practice but also feel valued and invested in from the outset.

One of the most significant outcomes of this strategy is the reduction in reliance on agency social workers within Children's Services. By investing in permanent staff and supporting their development, we are projecting a cost saving of nearly £1 million in agency spend for the current financial year compared to 2024/25 which represents a major efficiency gain.

Retention of experienced staff remains a priority across both services. We are committed to creating a working environment that supports professional growth, wellbeing, and job satisfaction. Key initiatives include a comprehensive and evolving training offer, high-quality, reflective supervision, access to wellbeing incentives and flexible working arrangements, these measures are designed to foster a culture of support and recognition, ensuring that staff feel empowered and equipped to deliver high-quality service across Stockton."

Councillor Lynn Hall asked the following supplementary question:-

"How many vacancies does the Council have and how many of them are agency social workers and how do these figures compare with the wider Tees Valley and can we learn from the wider region who definitely use fewer agency staff?"

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People responded with:-

"I don't have those figures to hand but I will get you a written response."

Councillor Jason French submitted the following question for response by the Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture:-

"On the 4th June 2025 Stockton Borough Council's Planning Committee refused planning permission to demolish a lodge at the entrance to Preston Park and replace it with a steel/alloy sculpture.

Can the Leader provide an update as to the cost of bringing the application forward to the Planning Committee, and what costs were incurred for the design, and fabrication if undertaken, for the steel/alloy sculpture."

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture responded with:-

"The total cost to date on professional fees for the development and submission of the designs for the area of Preston Park within which the South Lodge sits, is estimated to be £36,500.

This includes architects, structural design, historic building recording and archaeology, Planning application and listed building consent production/submission. This also includes

design for the intended interpretation of the Stockton & Darlington Railway in that location. This expenditure is not wasted as the majority of the material produced will be used in the revised planning application.

No money has been spent on fabrication.”

Councillor Jason French asked the following supplementary question:-

“That application before the Planning Committee also sought permission for a feature to commemorate the bicentenary of Stockton to Darlington railway. Can Councillor Cooke update Members of the plans going forward for this feature to commemorate the bicentenary of Stockton to Darlington railway in Preston Park? As I’m aware this takes place over September and time is pressing. What are the plans for the funding £320k funding that was provided by the previous government?”

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture responded with:-

“Clearly the bicentenary is an event that a lot of people in Stockton will want to celebrate. There are a lot of events planned and there are exhibitions going forward. All of that information is available to Councillors and I believe press releases have gone out to Councillors as well as the public with regard to those events. With regard to the application around South Lodge as I said in my original answer that application wasn’t granted by the Planning Committee and I respect the independence of the Planning Committee. I look forward to a revised application and work will be on-going on that. So we will respect those due processes and see where we are at the end of the process.”

COU/45/25 Forward Plan and Leader’s Statement

Since Council had last met on 21 May Cabinet had convened on 12 June and again on 17 July. As always, the minutes from those meetings are available on the SBC website.

Looking ahead, Cabinet was next scheduled to meet on 18 September. As there was no Cabinet meeting in August, the Forward Plan for September is not yet fully populated. Officers will bring forward additional items in due course. Members would be aware that the Forward Plan was available online and was regularly updated. One key item already scheduled for consideration is the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2025–2030).

The Leader of the Council had the pleasure of accompanying the Mayor on visits to both Preston Park Museum and Parkfield Community Centre, where they were joined by the Lord-Lieutenant of County Durham, Dame Sue Snowdon.

Dame Sue was due to retire after a remarkable period of service as the King’s representative in the Durham Lieutenancy. The Leader of the Council was sure the whole Council would want to join her in recognising her exceptional dedication to the role, her unwavering commitment to public service, and in particular, her strong support for our Borough over the years. The Council sent her very best wishes as she steps down from the Lieutenancy and thanked her sincerely for all work she had done.

Before the next meeting of Council there was a fantastic summer of events to look forward to across the Borough.

Stockton International Riverside Festival (SIRF) would return on 1 August. This world-renowned outdoor arts festival was a true highlight of the cultural calendar, promising surprise, skill, and spectacle for all the family. The Leader of the Council was incredibly proud that SIRF the North East’s largest free outdoor arts and street theatre

festival would once again transform the streets of Stockton with music, circus, dance, and more.

The spectacular launch show, Lifelines, would see world-class parkour performers reimagine Stockton's architecture as a dynamic stage scaling buildings and defying gravity in a breathtaking display of movement and creativity.

The Leader of the Council looked forward to seeing members at the festival, and again at the next full Council meeting on 24 September.