

## **Executive Scrutiny Committee**

A meeting of Executive Scrutiny Committee was held on Tuesday 16th December 2025.

**Present:** Cllr Sylvia Walmsley (Chair), Cllr Kevin Faulks (Vice-Chair), Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Stephen Dodds (sub for Cllr Tony Riordan), Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Sufi Mubeen and Cllr Marilyn Surtees

**Officers:** Majella McCarthy, Clare Harper, Ged Morton, Lisa Williams, Jonathan Nertney, Judy Trainer, Gary Woods, Michelle Gunn and Junita Agyapong

**Also in attendance:** None

**Apologies:** Cllr Tony Riordan and Cllr Hugo Stratton

### **ESC/34/25 Evacuation Procedure**

The evacuation procedure was noted.

### **ESC/35/25 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Sylvia Warmesley wished it to be recorded for transparency purposes only that on item 6, Financial Update and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), she was a member of the Thornaby Town Deal Board.

For transparency purposes, Councillor Jim Beall declared an interest in agenda item 7 as his late mother had been a recipient of the reablement service.

For transparency purposes, Councillor Shakeel Hussain declared an interest in agenda item 8 as he was a Muslim Funeral Director who had taken part in the review of the Muslim and Faith Burial Services.

### **ESC/36/25 Minutes**

AGREED that the minutes of the meeting on 18th November 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **ESC/37/25 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Public Report**

The Committee considered a report which provided details of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Public, which had formally been considered by Cabinet, with a request that the matter be further considered through Executive Scrutiny Committee.

Members were advised that letters of apology had been sent to the ninety-nine families affected. Of the 99, 98 reviews had in fact taken place with one planned.

The practice of issuing “no change” letters had been discontinued and all families affected had now had a full annual review. Members were advised of the introduction

of a robust process going forward, including the checks that would be involved. It was noted that the total redress of £7,750 had been funded through the special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) budget as the funding came from a ring-fenced grant which included administration costs. This payment was confirmed as a one-off cost and did not affect the Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

The Committee was informed that the service was collaborating with Digital Teams to develop a more digitalised process. Officers advised that staff learning and development arrangements were in place.

AGREED that the report be noted.

## **ESC/38/25 Financial Update and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)**

The Committee considered a report which provided a financial update and an indicative position for the Medium-term financial plan (MTFP). The report identified rising cost and demand pressures that exceeded expected increases in government funding, which resulted in a widening projected budget gap £11.5m in 2026/27, and £18.4m in 2027/28.

- **Summary:** The areas that experienced the greatest budgetary challenges were Adults Social Care, Children's Social Care and Home to School Transport. Mitigating actions had been identified since Quarter 1 to positively reduce the forecast overspend to £4.127m.
- **General Fund:** The included table showed a projected budget outturn position for each Directorate in 2025/26, based on information to 30 September 2025. A projected overspend of £4.1m was reported at quarter 2, compared to £1.7m at quarter 1, with the reasons for any significant variances from those previously reported subsequently summarised for each SBC directorate.

It was reported that growing demand for council services and increased cost of delivery had placed pressure on several budgets. Following the projected overspend at Quarter 1, senior officers had undertaken an urgent exercise to identify mitigating actions to improve the in-year financial position. This exercise had identified £2.543m of savings, resulting in a revised forecast overspend of £4.127m.

- **Dedicated Schools Grant:** The grant deficit was held in a separate ring-fenced account, which stood at £6.72m on 31 March 2025 and was forecast to increase to £11.37m by 31 March 2026. The main reasons for the estimated growth in the number of children with SEND and increase in complexity of need. There is specific accounting treatment for this deficit which must be held in a separate ring-fenced account within the Council's overall financial statements.
- **Powering our Futures – Progress Towards Closing the Budget Gap:** The programme, particularly the transformation mission, had identified savings of £5.8m by 2026/27, which were included within the budget report in February 2025. Further savings have subsequently been identified including the review of the fostering offer.
- **Medium-term financial plan 2025-2028:** Due to ongoing growth in demand and costs for Adults and Children's Services the Council is projecting a significant

budget gap across the medium term of £11.5m in 2026/27, £18.4m in 2027/28 and £18.7m in 2028/29. This is an estimate of the projected position and will be confirmed in the budget report to Council in February following the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.

The report also presented an update on the Capital Programme.

In response, Committee comments / questions were recorded as follows:

- Members queried why the Adults Social Care budget in the report (£107m) differed from the figure included in the budget consultation (£84m) and the figure referenced in the CQC report (£6.6m). Officers advised that the report included the full directorate, while the budget consultation related to Adults Social Care only, and that a reconciliation would be provided.
- The additional grant from the DfE including grants to fund additional national insurance costs had been received later in the year.
- Members referred to the predicted savings of £5.8m from the Powering our Futures Programme and asked what actions would need to be taken if these savings did not materialise. Officers advised that achievement of planned savings is closely monitored through its financial management processes and any variation would be addressed within future budgets. There was an expectation that these savings would be met if not exceeded.
- Members asked what mitigations had been in place in relation to SEND if overspending continued. Officers highlighted the work that was taking place as part of the Delivering Better Programme (DBV) and the savings that had been reported in the Cabinet report as a result of the Additionally Resourced SEND provision. The Committee was advised that an update will be circulated following the meeting.
- Members asked whether the resurfacing works at Wellington Square Car Park had been completed and if not, where the funding was, given that the Council had borrowed £1m for the scheme. Officers advised that an update on the resurfacing would be provided.
- Members highlighted the shortfall in car parking income and the additional costs of delivering the service, which had resulted in a forecast pressure of £250,000 and a budget shortfall.
- Questions were asked if the virement of monies to the Golden Eagle had a detrimental effect on the works with North Thornaby. The chair clarified that because of the success of the project, performing over and above targets, no detrimental effect was evidenced, and copies of the full report would be circulated after the meeting.

## AGREED

1. That Executive Scrutiny Committee note:
  - a) The updated financial position for 2025/26.
  - b) The revised Capital Programme at Appendix A to the report.

- c) The virement of £500,000 from the Connecting Thornaby - Cycleways workstream allocation alongside £235,000 from the North Thornaby workstream into the Regenerating Thornaby Town Centre workstream.
  - d) The emerging issues for the MTFP.
2. That further responses be provided in relation to the above queries.

### **ESC/39/25 Scrutiny Review of Reablement Service**

Members received the Executive Summary from the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee's final report following its scrutiny review of the Reablement Service. The review highlighted positive outcomes for people supported by the service and identified opportunities to further strengthen provision, including the use of innovative technologies. Members noted that the Committee's review had taken place during a period of rapid change and coincided with separate reviews of the service via the Council's Powering Our Future (POF) initiative and an external consultant (Peopletoo). Difficulties had been experienced in receiving updates regarding POF-related developments, and issues in the sharing of the final Peopletoo findings led to the agreement and publication of the Committee's final report being delayed.

The Committee's final report had been considered by Cabinet in December 2025, at which time all recommendations were accepted. It was noted that implementation had progressed at pace and that the report had been well received.

Members acknowledged that the reablement service continued to respond effectively to changing needs and was valued for its focus on supporting people in a flexible and adaptable way.

AGREED that the Executive Summary be noted.

### **ESC/40/25 Scrutiny Review of Muslim and Faith Burial Services**

The Committee considered the Executive Summary from the Place Select Committee's final report following its Scrutiny Review of Muslim and Faith Burial Services. Members expressed their thanks for the engagement and representation of the Muslim community throughout the review process. It was acknowledged that the recommended installation of burial rings would give more choice to faith groups.

Members noted that Cabinet had accepted the recommendation to pre-purchase burial rings on a full cost-recovery basis, ensuring there would be no budgetary impact on the local authority.

It was reported that funeral directors had requested an extension to the permitted burial times beyond 2.30 pm, to better support the requirement for same-day burials. Members were advised that the Committee recommended this request be reviewed by officers.

AGREED that the Executive Summary be noted.

### **ESC/41/25 Crustaceans Death Working Group - Terms of Reference**

Members received an update on the Crustaceans Death Working Group.

Stockton-on-Tees had participated in the Working Group since 2022, and the Working Group had concluded their investigation in June 2025.

The Working Group met informally in July 2025 to discuss promotion of the report and the future of the Group. Several representatives expressed their wish to continue the work of the Group and therefore the terms of reference had been revised. The Groups new remit was to monitor the implementation of the recommendations, liaising with key stakeholders and lobbying relevant decision makers, for a period of 12 months.

Executive Scrutiny Committee was asked if they wished to continue to appoint a representative to the Working Group.

AGREED that no appointment be made to the working group at the present time, but updates be requested from Redcar & Cleveland Council.

#### **ESC/42/25 Forward Plan**

AGREED that the Forward Plan be noted.

#### **ESC/43/25 Chairs' Updates**

Members were provided with updates from the Chairs of each Select Committee. Areas highlighted included:

##### **ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH SELECT COMMITTEE**

Scrutiny Review - Reablement Service: The final report was presented and endorsed by Cabinet. A draft Action Plan in relation to the report's recommendations was to be considered for approval at the Committee meeting in February 2026. Members noted that an annual report was presented by the SBC Director of Public Health at the last Committee meeting in November 2025.

Scrutiny Review - Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carers Support Service: The last evidence-gathering session had taken place in November 2025, featuring contributions from Eastern Ravens Trust and Mobilise, an external online business working with SBC. A final evidence session was planned to include feedback from carers, external scrutiny of SBC carer-related provision, and other approaches outside the Borough. An informal session was scheduled to consider a summary of all information received.

##### **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE**

Monitoring - The December meeting would receive updates on the progress and impact of recommendations 6, 7, 10 and 13 following the Committee's Appreciative Inquiry into Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment.

Scrutiny Review - Children Not in School: Evidence was received in relation to children educated through Home and Hospital provision, Elective Home Education and Children Missing from Education.

##### **COMMUNITY SAFETY SELECT COMMITTEE**

Scrutiny Review - Children Affected by Domestic Abuse: Submissions from Cleveland Police were scheduled for consideration and further partner input planned for January 2026. The meeting in January 2026 was to include contributions from the Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership, alongside local Housing Services, with representatives from Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and Thirteen Housing Group.

## PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

Scrutiny Review - Partnership Working in Early Help: The Committee had agreed its final report and recommendations in December. Evidence had been heard from partner organisations, service users, and the Parent and Carer Forum. The review highlighted the need for partners to be supported in delivering Early Help, with improvements in communication, governance, and joint training. The report was scheduled for submission to Cabinet in January, with an executive summary to be shared with Executive Scrutiny.

Scrutiny Review - Post 16 Provision: A tripartite meeting had considered a draft scope and project plan for the review. The review aimed to assess current provision within the Borough and inform the Post 16 enrichment strategy. The scope and project plan would be presented for discussion and agreement at the January meeting.

## PLACE SELECT COMMITTEE

Scrutiny Review - Capital Projects: Evidence highlighted that regeneration held the largest budget share, Community, Environment and Culture had the most programmes, and Transportation managed the highest number of projects, with most of the funding coming from grants and contributions. The review was scheduled to report to Cabinet in May 2026.

Monitoring: Implementation of recommendations from the Domestic Waste and Recycling review were reported to be on track, with ongoing engagement and implementation planned from January 2026. The first update on the Affordable Housing review noted progress on a hybrid delivery model, participation in national programmes, and engagement with Government on empty homes and Local Housing Allowance rates.

AGREED that the Chairs' Updates be noted.

## **ESC/44/25 Chair's Update and Executive Scrutiny Work Programme**

AGREED that the Chair's Update and Executive Scrutiny Committee Work Programme be noted.

Chair: .....