

Council

A meeting of Council was held on Wednesday 18th March 2026.

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 John Coulson, Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Stephen Dodds, Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Dan Fagan, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Nathan Gale, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Mohammed Mazi, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Jack Miller, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Paul Rowling, Cllr Vanessa Sewell, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Emily Tate, Cllr Jim Taylor, Cllr Hilary Vickers, Cllr Marcus Vickers, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Alan Watson, Cllr Sally Ann Watson, Cllr Katie Weston and Cllr Paul Weston

Officers: Mike Greene, Tracey Carter, Clare Harper, Marc Stephenson, Julie Butcher, Kirsty Grundy, Judy Trainer, Michael Henderson, Peter Bell, John Devine and Junita Agyapong

Also in attendance: Press and public

Apologies: Cllr Jason French and Cllr Ray Godwin

COU/82/25 Welcome and Evacuation Procedure

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

COU/83/25 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

COU/84/25 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meetings held on 21 January 2026 and 18 February 2026.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 21 January 2026 and 18 February 2026 be confirmed and signed by the Worshipful the Mayor as a correct record.

COU/85/25 Minutes Silence Former Councillor Chris Coombs

Members observed a minute's silence as a mark of respect for former Councillor Chris Coombs who had recently passed away.

COU/86/25 Public Question Time

Question 1

A public question had been submitted. However, the questioner was not present at the meeting therefore it was advised that a written reply would be sent.

Question 2

A public question had been submitted by Samuel Bradford. However, the questioner was not present at the meeting therefore it was advised that a written reply would be sent to him.

Question 3

A public question had been submitted by Samuel Bradford. However, the questioner was not present at the meeting therefore it was advised that a written reply would be sent to him.

Question 4

The following question was submitted by Karlee Atkinson:

"Both myself, my councillor and others have reported on numerous occasions over the last 12 months about the illegal, dangerous and inconsiderate parking around Billingham South School. Particularly around Belasis Avenue and Bedale Avenue. Please can you tell me how many times that this area has been visited by enforcement and how many PCNs have been issued to vehicles in this area at school run times in that time?"

The Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety (Cllr Norma Stephenson) responded with:

"Thank you for bringing this issue to the Council's attention. I share your concern regarding illegal and dangerous parking, especially around schools in our borough.

Civil Enforcement Officers have been carrying out targeted patrols in this area. Where officers observe vehicles parked in contravention of restrictions, enforcement action is taken in accordance with legislation. Unfortunately, there are significant demands on the time of our Civic Enforcement Officers who cannot be at every school, at the same time. It is therefore important that parents and carers also play their own part in keeping young children and pedestrians safe by parking in a safe and legal manner.

In the current financial year, 21 Penalty Charge Notices have been issued in this area, compared with 8 issued in the previous financial year which demonstrates an increase in enforcement activity although issues associated with school parking cannot be dealt with through enforcement activity alone.

A patrol tasking in this area remains in place, and recent visits have shown improved compliance. I recognise the concern that enforcement activity may not always be visible. Enforcement is intelligence led and balanced against demand across the borough, but officers are instructed to take action whenever contraventions are witnessed. Alongside enforcement, the Council continues to focus on education and visibility to encourage better driver behaviour and improve compliance over time.

The Council will continue to monitor this area closely and adjust enforcement activity where necessary. The safety of pedestrians, particularly around schools, remains a priority and we will continue to use both enforcement and engagement to reduce the risk of serious incidents.”

Karlee Atkinson asked the following supplementary question:

“Three weeks ago, during school run time, an enforcement van was observed driving at a snail’s pace passed cars parked illegally. Enforcement Officers were seen walking in areas where there are parking bays but ignored the problem area. What is the Council going to do about this?”

The Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety (Cllr Norma Stephenson) responded with:

“Parking is not within the Council’s remit, but we do our best to address the problem. Thank you for raising this issue. I will investigate.”

Question 5

The following question was submitted by Christopher Lipthorpe:

“Will the council ban all contracts with Palantir?”

I am concerned about Palantir's technology being used for social credit scoring and crime prediction in Teesside. This is a dystopian system which can lead to self-censorship and a loss of individual autonomy.

Palantir is also developing AI-powered weapons systems for use in Israel's conflict with Palestinians in Gaza. This violates international humanitarian law, human rights and our basic privacy and freedoms.”

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport (Cllr Paul Rowling) responded with:

“Thank you, Mr Lipthorpe, for your question.

I completely understand why residents raise concerns about the ethics of new technologies and about the behaviour of some of the very large companies operating in that space. Those are legitimate issues, and it is right that people scrutinise them.

But it is also important to be clear about the role of a local authority. Councils cannot pick and choose which companies to exclude from procurement based on political views or international matters. We are required to follow national procurement law and to run fair, open and transparent processes that show value for money and comply fully with UK legislation.

What we can do, and what this administration is very clear about, is make sure that any technology used by this council meets the highest standards of data protection, transparency and accountability. And where digital or AI systems are involved, they must comply with UK law and sit within proper governance and oversight.

And just to remove any doubt: there are no proposals before this council to introduce any kind of social credit scoring in our borough.

I am pleased to assure Mr Lipthorpe that our focus will remain exactly where it should be on protecting residents' rights, using technology responsibly, and ensuring that all decisions are taken openly and comply with the law. That is the standard we have set, and it is the standard we will continue to apply."

Christopher Lipthorpe asked the following supplementary question:

"What personal and anonymised data is shared with Palantir or other similar agencies?"

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport (Cllr Paul Rowling) responded with:

"To my knowledge none but I will check and give a comprehensive answer to the questioner and share with all Councillors."

Question 6

The following question was submitted by John McDermottroe:

"In regard to the MTFP Of the £6.7 million savings required in 2026/27, how much is currently supported by fully costed and approved proposals rather than assumptions within Phase 2 of transformation?"

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport (Cllr Paul Rowling) responded with:

"To close the budget gap, we're continuing to take a planned and well managed approach to transformation and change through our Powering Our Future framework. Our programme management processes are now well embedded, and we've already seen the benefits — including the overachievement of savings delivered in Phase 1 of the Transformation Programme.

Phase 2 is now underway. This stage is focused on improving day to day efficiency, carrying out detailed service reviews and looking at opportunities across the whole council. As part of this, we're also developing our project management approach so it remains fit for purpose and able to support us through the significant financial pressures ahead, while still ensuring we deliver high quality services for our communities.

Good progress has already been made. All reviews are now being taken through a clear and robust governance process, and many are now in the design stage. This includes detailed baselining work, identifying the outcomes we want to achieve, and

starting to map out how savings and other benefits will be delivered. We're also exploring invest to save options and new opportunities to generate income.

At this stage, part of the £6.7 million savings needed for 2026/27 is supported by fully costed proposals. The remaining amount is based on assumptions linked to the ongoing Phase 2 Transformation work, which is moving through the gateway process. We expect fully developed, costed options to be ready for approval ahead of the next formal update of the MTFP as business cases are completed.”

John McDermottroe asked the following supplementary question:

“If a significant number of proposals are at design stage, what contingency measures have been identified to avoid using reserves?”

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport (Cllr Paul Rowling) responded with:

“We decided last month that reserves are too low and agreed a process to replenish these. There is nothing to indicate that we won't meet our targets and do not envisage using reserves.”

Question 7

The following question was submitted by John McDermottoe:

“Children's Social Care is projected to require an additional £5 million next year, rising to £13 million by 2028/29. What structural changes are being implemented to reduce reliance on high-cost external placements?”

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (Cllr Clare Besford) responded with:

“Like many Authorities across the country, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is experiencing sustained pressure on the Children's Services budget, particularly in relation to the cost of external care arrangements. In response, we are implementing a range of structural changes designed to reduce our use of high-cost external care whilst ensuring that children continue to receive safe, stable and consistent support.

A central aspect of this work is the expansion of our own in house children's home provision. We are developing new residential children's homes specifically designed to support children with complex social and emotional needs, including those who have experienced significant trauma. These homes will provide a therapeutic environment with skilled staff and specialist multi-disciplinary support so that more children can receive the care they need locally rather than in high cost, external and sometimes out of area settings.

We are strengthening our fostering service. We have redesigned our fostering offer as we seek to recruit, train and retain more foster carers, including carers with the skills and confidence to support children with more complex needs. Increasing the number of local fostering families helps to ensure that children can remain in family-based care arrangements wherever possible, reducing the need to use external provision.

We also work closely with ethical and high-quality providers as part of our sufficiency and commissioning strategy. Our focus is on shaping the local care market so that the homes available reflect the needs of our children. We seek to work with partners who share our values and who are committed to delivering stable, child-centred care, whilst offering better value for the Council.

Regionally, we are contributing to the development of Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs). RCCs seek to support councils to work together to plan, commission and develop residential and fostering provision. By working at scale, we expect to have greater influence over the market, improve sufficiency and reduce the cost pressures associated with spot purchasing external care arrangements.

We are also strengthening our borough level sufficiency planning, using better forecasting and data to ensure we have the right mix of homes and care arrangements to meet current and future need. This includes a stronger focus on kinship care, helping more children to remain safely within their wider family network where appropriate.

Alongside this, we are committed to providing earlier help and edge of care support for families. By providing targeted interventions, intensive family support and specialist services at an earlier stage, we aim to reduce the number of children who need to come into care in the first place. This improves outcomes for families and reduces long term demand for high-cost care arrangements.

Finally, we are continuing to stabilise our workforce. Reducing reliance on agency staff supports more consistent planning for children, reduces the risk of care arrangements breaking down and helps us to make timely, well-informed decisions about the most appropriate support for each child.

Together, these measures form a long-term strategy to reduce our use of high-cost external care arrangements, strengthen local capacity and ensure that children receive the right support at the right time.”

John McDermottroe asked the following supplementary question:

“How many placements are external and what is the cost? What is the target to reduce these over the next two years?”

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (Cllr Clare Besford) responded with:

“We cannot share the number of placements publicly but will provide average costs as a written response.”

Question 8

A public question had been submitted by Geoffrey Mawson. However, the questioner was not present at the meeting therefore it was advised that a written reply would be sent to him.

Question 9

The following question was submitted by Jess Hobson:

“Thirteen, the non-profit social housing provider, have increased rents by 1% over inflation year-on-year for 5 years whilst increasing capital reserves to over £800 million. At the same time, social housing tenants face high levels of poverty and deprivation across Teesside which will be further embedded by increased rent. Given this, will the council write to Thirteen and urge them to implement a rent freeze?”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing (Cllr Richard Eglington) responded with:

“In making its annual rent determination, Thirteen has taken a number of factors into account. In summary, these include:

- The need to invest in improving existing homes, ensuring they are energy-efficient and meet required standards.
- The importance of providing appropriate, high-quality housing and tenancy services that meet their tenants’ needs.
- Working with tenants to build stronger communities.

Thirteen has advised its tenants how it plans to spend money in 2026/27. They anticipate spending £320 million, which includes:

- Modernising homes: £68.4m
- Supporting people and communities: £9m
- Repairs and maintenance: £64.3m
- Service charges (the costs of running and maintaining shared buildings and spaces): £17.9m
- Building new homes: £78.6m (funded by grants and loans)
- Managing homes: £33.7m
- Interest payments: £21.9m

It is also important to acknowledge that the rules for setting rents are determined by the Regulator of Social Housing. These rules ensure rents are fair and affordable. The regulator allows housing associations such as Thirteen to increase rents by:

- The Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation rate from the previous September
- Plus 1%

In September, CPI was 3.8%, resulting in a total permitted increase of 4.8% from April 2026.

While the Council recognises the pressures on household incomes, we also acknowledge the rising costs that Thirteen faces—for example, increased prices for building materials and essential services required to keep homes safe and in good condition. Taking all of these factors into consideration, the Council does not feel it is appropriate on this occasion to write to Thirteen to ask them not to implement a rent increase.”

Jess Hobson asked the following supplementary question:

“Do you advocate increasing funding from Central Government?”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing (Cllr Richard Eglington) responded with:

“Organisations have to resolve their funding issues themselves. However, we do work with all social housing providers to keep rent down as much as possible.”

COU/87/25 Appointments to Committees for 2026/27

Consideration was given to a report seeking changes to Committee memberships in accordance with the wishes of political groups.

RESOLVED

- (1) That Councillor Sylvia Walmsley replace Councillor Ian Dalgarno on People Select Committee.
- (2) That Councillor Steve Dodds replace Councillor Dan Fagan on Planning Committee.

COU/88/25 Revisions to the Council's Constitution

Consideration was given to a report asking Council to approve revisions to the Council's Constitution following consideration by Member' Advisory Panel and Cabinet.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the wording within the Council's Constitution is amended to be clear and consistent that if there are over 1000 signatures on a petition, then referral to Council is automatic and that only final responses, not all correspondence, will be published.
- (2) That the Council's Constitution specifies that electronic petitions are only accepted via the Modern.Gov platform to enable the Council to set the parameters of the petition (i.e. that the petition can only be signed by a person if they live, work or study in the Borough).
- (3) That the Council's Constitution is amended to extend the composition of the Scrutiny Liaison Committee to include the Group Leader and Deputy Group Leader of each political party on the Council (where they are not already a member of the Forum in another role).

COU/89/25 Motions to Council

Motion 1

It was moved by Cllr Ted Strike and seconded by Cllr Tony Riordan and

RESOLVED That

“Council notes that:

Adult Social Care is a national statutory responsibility placed upon local authorities by Parliament, yet the current funding framework depends heavily on locally raised council tax, including the Adult Social Care precept. Because council tax bases vary significantly across England, residents in areas with lower property values are required to contribute proportionally more to raise the equivalent level of Adult Social Care funding as those in areas with stronger tax bases. This creates a structural and systemic inequity in the financing of what is, by law, a national service. Council further notes that, despite repeated commitments from successive governments to reform Adult Social Care funding, the present arrangements remain unchanged.

Council further notes that:

The continued reliance on local taxation to fund a national statutory service is both unsustainable and unfair. The responsibility for addressing this inequity, and for establishing a fair and resilient national funding model for Adult Social Care, rests squarely with Central Government.

Council therefore resolves:

- (1) That the Chief Executive be instructed to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer
 - (a) seeking an immediate and definitive timetable for the introduction of a replacement national funding model for Adult Social Care; and
 - (b) calling upon the Government to introduce, without delay, an interim national equalisation mechanism for the Adult Social Care element of council tax, such that residents in equivalent council tax bands contribute on a consistent basis across England regardless of variations in local tax base.
- (2) That the communication make clear that this Council considers the current funding model inequitable and in urgent need of reform.
- (3) That any response received from the Chancellor of the Exchequer be reported to Full Council at the earliest available meeting.”

Motion 2

It was moved by Councillor Niall Innes and seconded by Councillor Tony Riordan:

“This Council notes:

- (1) That the Labour Government’s approach to public service funding, including the so-called “Fair Funding” arrangements and recent national settlements, has failed to deliver genuinely fair or needs-based funding for policing, fire and rescue services, or local government in areas such as Cleveland.
- (2) That Cleveland Police has publicly and repeatedly warned that current Government funding settlements are inadequate, unfair, and unsustainable, resulting in a projected funding shortfall of around £2.4 million, equivalent to

approximately 40 frontline police officers, despite continued high levels of crime, vulnerability, and demand. Between 2024-2025, national police forces have seen a net decrease of 2,195 officers.

- (3) That Cleveland Police received the lowest percentage funding increase nationally, a settlement which its Labour Police and Crime Commissioner has described as deeply unfair and disconnected from operational reality, placing frontline policing at risk.
- (4) That since Labour came to power in 2024, police forces nationally have faced ongoing real-terms funding pressure, with forces such as Cleveland being forced to plan for reductions in officer numbers, fewer specialist roles, and reduced neighbourhood policing capacity, not because demand has fallen, but because Government funding has failed to keep pace with costs.
- (5) That Cleveland Fire Brigade remains one of the most financially constrained fire services in the country, with a structural funding gap projected at around £1.77 million, even after proposed council tax precept increases.
- (6) That Cleveland Fire Brigade has made clear that continued under-funding places frontline resilience at risk, forcing difficult decisions on staffing, appliances, and service delivery, and transferring the burden of national funding failures onto local residents.
- (7) That Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has itself been negatively impacted by the Government's funding framework, including:
 - A worsening financial position driving poor fiscal planning.
 - Missing out entirely on any share of the additional £740 million announced in the Final Local Government Finance Settlement, despite significant local need.
 - Being excluded from multiple support grants purely because of headline Core Spending Power calculations that mask real-world pressures.

This Council believes:

- (1) That the Government's "Fair Funding" approach is neither fair nor reflective of need and systematically disadvantages areas such as Stockton-on-Tees and the wider Cleveland area.
- (2) That current under-funding of police and fire services directly undermines public safety, increases risk to residents, and erodes confidence in essential public services.
- (3) That the Government's reliance on council tax precepts to prop up police and fire funding is regressive, unfairly shifting responsibility from the Exchequer to local households, many of whom are already under severe cost-of-living pressure.

This Council resolves:

- (1) That the Council write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, expressing this Council's deep concern and strong opposition to the impact of the Labour

Government's funding policies on Police and Fire Services, particularly the consequences of the current Fair Funding approach.

(2) That the correspondence explicitly highlights:

- The severe and disproportionate impact of funding shortfalls on Cleveland Police, including the real risk of losing frontline officers and reduced community policing in Stockton-on-Tees.
- The ongoing financial fragility of Cleveland Fire Brigade, and the unacceptable risks this creates for emergency response and public safety.
- The failure of national funding decisions to recognise the needs of Stockton-on-Tees and the wider Cleveland area, despite unambiguous evidence of demand and need.

(3) That the Council calls on the Chancellor to urgently review and reform current funding arrangements, to:

- Deliver genuinely fair, needs-based funding for Police and Fire Services
- Provide immediate redress for Forces and Brigades facing funding-driven reductions.
- Ensure areas such as Cleveland Police and Cleveland Fire Brigade services are no longer penalised by flawed funding formulas.

(4) That the letter be issued on behalf of the Council by the Chief Executive.”

Councillor Paul Rowling moved and Councillor Norma Stephenson seconded the following amendment:

“This Council notes:

- (1) Recent national settlements, have failed to deliver genuinely fair or needs-based funding for policing, fire and rescue services, or local government in areas such as Cleveland.
- (2) That Cleveland Police has publicly and repeatedly warned that current Government funding settlements are inadequate, unfair, and unsustainable, resulting in a projected funding shortfall of around £2.4 million, equivalent to approximately 40 frontline police officers, despite continued high levels of crime, vulnerability, and demand.
- (3) That Cleveland Police received the lowest percentage funding increase nationally, a settlement which its Labour Police and Crime Commissioner has described as deeply unfair and disconnected from operational reality, placing frontline policing at risk.
- (4) Since 2010, police forces nationally have faced ongoing real-terms funding pressure, with forces such as Cleveland being forced to plan for reductions in officer numbers, fewer specialist roles, and reduced neighbourhood policing

capacity, not because demand has fallen, but because Government funding has failed to keep pace with costs.

- (5) That Cleveland Fire Brigade remains one of the most financially constrained fire services in the country, with a structural funding gap projected at around £1.77 million, even after agreed council tax precept increases.
- (6) That Cleveland Fire Brigade has made clear that continued under-funding places frontline resilience at risk, forcing difficult decisions on staffing, appliances, and service delivery, and transferring the burden of national funding failures onto local residents.
- (7) That Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has itself been impacted by the Government's funding framework, including:
 - Increases in funding not keeping up with service demand.
 - Missing out entirely on any share of the additional £740 million announced in the Final Local Government Finance Settlement, despite significant local need.
 - Being excluded from multiple support grants purely because of headline Core Spending Power calculations that mask real-world pressures.

This Council believes:

- (1) That the funding approach seen over the last decade and the first-year allocation under "Fair Funding" is neither fair nor reflective of need and systematically disadvantages areas such as Stockton-on-Tees and the wider Cleveland area.
- (2) That current under-funding of police and fire services directly undermines public safety, increases risk to residents, and erodes confidence in essential public services.
- (3) That the Government's reliance on council tax precepts to prop up police and fire funding is regressive, unfairly shifting responsibility from the Exchequer to local households, many of whom are already under severe cost-of-living pressure.

This Council resolves:

- (1) That the Council write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, expressing this Council's deep concern and strong opposition to the impact of funding policies since 2010 on Police and Fire Services.
- (2) That the correspondence explicitly highlights:
 - The severe and disproportionate impact of funding shortfalls on Cleveland Police, including the real risk of losing frontline officers and reduced community policing in Stockton-on-Tees.
 - The ongoing financial fragility of Cleveland Fire Brigade, and the potential risks this creates for emergency response and public safety.

- The failure of national funding decisions to recognise the needs of Stockton-on-Tees and the wider Cleveland area, despite unambiguous evidence of demand and need.

(3) That the Council calls on the Chancellor to urgently review and reform current funding arrangements, to:

- Deliver genuinely fair, needs-based funding for Police and Fire Services
- Provide immediate redress for Forces and Brigades facing funding-driven reductions.
- Ensure areas such as Cleveland Police and Cleveland Fire Brigade services are no longer penalised by flawed funding formulas.

(4) That the letter be issued on behalf of the Council by the Chief Executive.”

Following debate and in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.65, it was requested that a recorded vote be taken on the amendment, which was supported by at least a quarter of the Members present.

Members in favour of the amendment:

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

Members against the amendment:

Cllr Diane Clarke OBE, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Stephen Dodds, Cllr Dan Fagan, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Mohammed Mazi, Cllr Jack Miller, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Vanessa Sewell, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Emily Tate, Cllr Jim Taylor, Cllr Hilary Vickers and Cllr Marcus Vickers, Cllr Alan Watson and Cllr Sally Ann Watson.

Abstained:

Cllr Stefan Barnes, Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Mick Moore and Cllr Sylvia Walmsely.

24 for the amendment

25 against the amendment

5 abstained

The amendment was declared not carried.

Following debate and in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.65, it was requested that a recorded vote be taken on the substantive motion, which was supported by at least a quarter of the Members present.

Members in favour of the motion:

Cllr Stefan Barnes, Cllr Diane Clarke OBE, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Stephen Dodds, Cllr Dan Fagan, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Mohammed Mazi, Cllr Jack Miller, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Vanessa Sewell, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Emily Tate, Cllr Jim Taylor, Cllr Hilary Vickers and Cllr Marcus Vickers, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Alan Watson and Cllr Sally Ann Watson.

Members against the motion:

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

Abstained:

Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Mick Moore and Cllr Ross Patterson.

29 for the motion

22 against the motion

3 abstained

The motion was declared carried and it was

RESOLVED

“This Council notes:

- (1) That the Labour Government’s approach to public service funding, including the so-called “Fair Funding” arrangements and recent national settlements, has failed to deliver genuinely fair or needs-based funding for policing, fire and rescue services, or local government in areas such as Cleveland.
- (2) That Cleveland Police has publicly and repeatedly warned that current Government funding settlements are inadequate, unfair, and unsustainable, resulting in a projected funding shortfall of around £2.4 million, equivalent to approximately 40 frontline police officers, despite continued high levels of crime, vulnerability, and demand. Between 2024 2025, national police forces have seen a net decrease of 2,195 officers.
- (3) That Cleveland Police received the lowest percentage funding increase nationally, a settlement which its Labour Police and Crime Commissioner has described as

deeply unfair and disconnected from operational reality, placing frontline policing at risk.

- (4) That since Labour came to power in 2024, police forces nationally have faced ongoing real-terms funding pressure, with forces such as Cleveland being forced to plan for reductions in officer numbers, fewer specialist roles, and reduced neighbourhood policing capacity, not because demand has fallen, but because Government funding has failed to keep pace with costs.
- (5) That Cleveland Fire Brigade remains one of the most financially constrained fire services in the country, with a structural funding gap projected at around £1.77 million, even after proposed council tax precept increases.
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- (7) That Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has itself been negatively impacted by the Government's funding framework, including:
 - A worsening financial position driving poor fiscal planning.
 - Missing out entirely on any share of the additional £740 million announced in the Final Local Government Finance Settlement, despite significant local need.
 - Being excluded from multiple support grants purely because of headline Core Spending Power calculations that mask real-world pressures.

This Council believes:

- (1) That the Government's "Fair Funding" approach is neither fair nor reflective of need and systematically disadvantages areas such as Stockton-on-Tees and the wider Cleveland area.
- (2) That current under-funding of police and fire services directly undermines public safety, increases risk to residents, and erodes confidence in essential public services.
- (3) That the Government's reliance on council tax precepts to prop up police and fire funding is regressive, unfairly shifting responsibility from the Exchequer to local households, many of whom are already under severe cost-of-living pressure.

This Council resolves:

- (1) That the Council write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, expressing this Council's deep concern and strong opposition to the impact of the Labour Government's funding policies on Police and Fire Services, particularly the consequences of the current Fair Funding approach.
- (2) That the correspondence explicitly highlights:

- The severe and disproportionate impact of funding shortfalls on Cleveland Police, including the real risk of losing frontline officers and reduced community policing in Stockton-on-Tees.
- The ongoing financial fragility of Cleveland Fire Brigade, and the unacceptable risks this creates for emergency response and public safety.
- The failure of national funding decisions to recognise the needs of Stockton-on-Tees and the wider Cleveland area, despite unambiguous evidence of demand and need.

(3) That the Council calls on the Chancellor to urgently review and reform current funding arrangements, to:

- Deliver genuinely fair, needs-based funding for Police and Fire Services
- Provide immediate redress for Forces and Brigades facing funding-driven reductions.
- Ensure areas such as Cleveland Police and Cleveland Fire Brigade services are no longer penalised by flawed funding formulas.

(4) That the letter be issued on behalf of the Council by the Chief Executive.”

COU/90/25 Members' Question Time

Question 1

Councillor Nathan Gale withdrew his question.

Question 2

The following question was submitted by Cllr Barbara Inman:

“In light of the Government’s Best Start in Life Strategy which sets ambitious targets for all local authorities to significantly increase the proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028, what are Stockton Council’s planned measures to improve GLD outcomes for children and how will these initiatives support early years settings, families and communities across the Borough?”

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (Cllr Clare Besford responded with:

“I am pleased to update Council on the progress we are making through our Best Start in Life work—progress that reflects this authority’s determination to address inequality at its roots, not simply talk about it.

Members will be aware that achieving a Good Level of Development is a key measure of school readiness, capturing children’s early communication, physical development, personal and social skills, literacy and maths. These are the foundations of opportunity. If we are serious about fairness, if we truly believe in equality of opportunity, then we cannot allow gaps to widen before a child even starts school.

Last week, I presented to Cabinet our new Best Start in Life Plan, co-produced with families and partners. This plan is not just another strategy on a shelf. It is a clear statement of intent: that persistent inequalities in this borough must be confronted, not accepted; and that every child—regardless of background, postcode or circumstance—deserves the same strong start.

Our plan focuses on three priority areas.

First, strengthening family support and the home learning environment. Through our Family Hubs, we are improving access to parenting support, early literacy and play sessions, and providing clear information on child development. This is about practical action that empowers families, not rhetoric.

Second, improving speech, language and communication. We are promoting consistent early communication messages, improving joint work at the 2 to 2½ year review, expanding evidence-based programmes and investing in workforce skills. Early intervention is one of the strongest tools we have to break cycles of disadvantage.

Third, supporting high quality early years provision. We are working with settings to strengthen quality, improve SEND support and increase take up of funded childcare places. Access to good early education should never depend on how well a family can navigate the system.

To deliver this, we have established a multi-agency School Readiness Focus Group, bringing together health, education, early years providers and the voluntary sector. And in Redhill, we are testing an enhanced 0–5 offer through a new Best Start Family Hub—learning what works before scaling it borough wide.

Mr Mayor, improving GLD outcomes is ambitious, but it is essential if we want a fairer, more equal Stockton on Tees. This Council has made a commitment: that every child should have the strongest possible start in life. And through this plan, we are acting on that commitment.

I want to be clear: this is not the responsibility of one service or one administration. It is a responsibility we share with our partners, with our members.

We each have a role in championing early years, supporting families in our communities, promoting the use of Family Hubs, and challenging inequality wherever we see it.

let us work together, across parties and across wards, to support this plan, to communicate it in our communities, and to stand behind the principle that every child in Stockton on Tees deserves the very best start in life.”

Cllr Barbara Inman asked the following supplementary question:

“Would you please comment on school readiness?”

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (Cllr Clare Besford) responded with:

“This is being picked up by the School Readiness Group.”

Question 3

Councillor Sufi Mubeen had submitted a question but as he had left the meeting before the question could be asked, under the Constitution, the question would be referred to the next Council meeting.

Question 4

The following question was submitted by Cllr Marcus Vickers:

“Many residents enjoy doing their part to recycle household waste; however, the current recycling system of bags and boxes is often cited as a point of frustration for a lot of residents, particularly our elderly folk who are sometimes physically challenged with the handling of them.

Given the decision to transition to fortnightly waste collections, will the Cabinet Member agree with me, and a great number of our residents, that a standard recycling wheelie bin, like the ones used by our Neighbouring Authorities, would remove the frustration and physical challenges for our residents and make it easier for them to take part in the recycling initiative?”

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture (Cllr Nigel Cooke): responded with:

“The Government’s new Simpler Recycling legislation, which comes into effect in April 2026, requires paper and card to be collected separately from other recyclables to reduce contamination from food and liquids. If we were to introduce wheeled bins, we would need to issue two bins per household to comply with this requirement, which presents additional logistical and space challenges for many residents as well as significant cost at a time when we can least afford it. For these reasons and following a full analysis of all options which was conducted as part of a cross party scrutiny review, the Council has decided to retain the use of bags and boxes for recycling collections. This collection arrangement also provided the most cost-effective option for the Council when considering that Council’s that use bins see contamination rates in excess of 30%, whereas Stockton’s contamination rates are less than 5%.

From April, general waste will be collected fortnightly in the green wheeled bin, while recycling will be collected weekly using the existing white hessian bag, blue box, and a new blue hessian bag. Food waste will also be collected weekly using a lockable external caddy and a small internal kitchen caddy, in line with Simpler Recycling legislation. To address concerns about bags blowing away or becoming too heavy, we have previously redesigned the white bags with fastening mechanisms and weighted bottoms, and the new blue bag is now heavier at 1kg, reducing incidences of bags blowing away in extremely windy conditions. These changes are based on national legislation and evidence from WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme), which shows that reducing residual waste collections and increasing recycling collections improves recycling rates and therefore provides the most cost-effective collection solution.”

Cllr Marcus Vickers asked the following supplementary question:

“To maximise flexibility for local authorities and households, DEFRA introduced an exemption to allow the co-collection of food and garden waste. Concluding that there was no evidence that it would affect the ability to be recycled or composted, since the materials can always be processed through in-vessel composting when mixed.

Will the Cabinet Member agree with me that if this Labour Led Council had followed the DEFRA exemption, like many other councils, then our residents would have been able to place their garden and food waste into one wheelie bin, the costs of which were covered by DEFRA, the co-mingled waste would still be collected weekly, making it easier for residents, and the unnecessary desire to hit residents with their annual garden waste tax was entirely avoidable.?”

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture (Cllr Nigel Cooke):
responded with:

“We offer a subscription service but no one is obliged to participate. Our approach is based on the recommendations of the cross-party scrutiny committee. We have to consider the end point and although the Council has the option to co-mingle garden and food waste, this is not the best approach for every Local Authority.”

Question 5

The following question was submitted by Cllr Jack Miller:

“Given the council’s decision to move to fortnightly residual waste collections, what specific provisions will be put in place to support households that produce unavoidable sanitary and incontinence waste, particularly those with disabled or vulnerable children and adults, to ensure they are not disproportionately affected by the change?”

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture (Cllr Nigel Cooke):
responded with:

“From Tuesday 31st March, general waste collected in the green wheeled bin will move to a fortnightly schedule. This change brings Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council in line with national practice, where over 75% of local authorities in England have operated fortnightly general waste collections for many years. At the same time, the Council will introduce a new nationally mandated separate weekly food waste collection and we have also taken the decision to increase dry recycling collections to from fortnightly to weekly, helping to divert as much recyclable and compostable material as possible away from the general waste bin.

Recent compositional analysis of waste across the Borough showed that, on average, 33% of refuse placed in the general waste bin was food waste—material that will now be captured by the new weekly food waste service. In addition, more than 60% of the bin contents were also found to be recyclable through existing kerbside services. These changes are designed to maximise capacity, reduce disposal costs and support residents in managing their waste effectively.

We appreciate that some households, particularly those with medical needs, may find it more challenging to store waste for two weeks. To support residents in these circumstances, the Council offers additional capacity in the form of a 360 litre bin for households that meet the eligibility criteria. This includes households with six or more occupants and those with medical needs such as the use of incontinence pads.

Eligibility is assessed through a recycling assessment to ensure households are effectively recycling prior to accepting the request.”

Cllr Jack Miller asked the following supplementary question:

“Residents are already expressing concern that fortnightly collections could create distressing and unsanitary conditions for families managing incontinence or medical needs. Will the Council commit to introducing or significantly expanding a dedicated hygiene or clinical waste collection service, and guarantee that vulnerable households can access it easily without complex application processes or stigma?”

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Culture (Cllr Nigel Cooke): responded with:

“We are meeting the requirements of the legislation and following similar practice to other Local Authorities. If anyone is struggling, I would advise them to contact the Care for Your Area team to explore what could be done to make life easier.”

Question 6

The following question was submitted by Cllr Barry Woodhouse:

“As the Chair of the Audit Committee. I would like to ask the Leader of the Council about her ability to comment on the finances of the council?”

The Leader of the Council (Cllr Lisa Evans) responded with:

“Thank you for your question, Councillor Woodhouse.

I think your question arises from the last Council meeting where many members of the opposition read out pre-prepared speeches, questioning my ability to understand the Council’s finances.

This approach was totally expected. I knew that it was coming and I was actually quite amused by it. It must be difficult having to direct insults to me at every single meeting.

Do I understand the budget process? Of course I do. I am constantly briefed on the Council’s finances by Clare Harper our Chief Finance Officer, Cllr Paul Rowling as the Cabinet Member responsible for finance, yourself as the Chair of Audit and also the Chief Executive.

What I did say in a previous meeting was that I ask for things to be explained in simple English. I hold my hands up at that and I stand by that. I am not a finance expert.

I am a very self-aware person. I understand my strengths, weaknesses and where I need to develop. Am I the best person to take the finance lead? No.

The measure to me of a good Leader is to look at the team around me. Look at their strengths and weaknesses. Identify the skillset of the team and appoint into roles accordingly. That is what you call leadership.

After the meeting, a member of the public who was present at the meeting, wrote to me. “About tonight’s meeting, Cllr Evans. I would just like to say that I am not sure of the context you made the comment about liking things in plain English, but for you to

be continually criticised for being less than perfect (and regarding a subject that most Cllrs of all colours do struggle with) sadly reflects on the petty toxicity of politics. If you have been open about your self-perception of not being a finance expert, then this is to your credit.”

I chose not to respond to these pre-prepared speeches at the meeting as I believe that’s exactly what was wanted of me. I won’t take any advice from the opposition on finances or the way that I choose my Cabinet.

Thank you.”

Cllr Barry Woodhouse asked the following supplementary question:

“Can the Leader comment on her ability to understand Tees Valley Combined Authority budgets?”

The Leader of the Council (Cllr Lisa Evans) responded with:

“I also understand the complexities of Combined Authority budgets and do get regular briefings.”

Question 7

The following question was submitted by Cllr Carol Clark:

“How many children benefited from the HAF scheme this half term?”

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (Cllr Clare Besford) responded with:

“1704 spaces were available and booked and 1461 attended which gives 85.7% of children brought to provision.

Of the 1461 spaces attended, we had 443 primary children and 183 secondary aged children, amounting to an overall total of 626 unique children.

This can be further analysed showing we hit our target of 85% of children attending met the essential criteria of benefit-related free school meals.”

Cllr Carol Clark asked the following supplementary question:

“How is the new booking system operating?”

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (Cllr Clare Besford) responded with:

“The frustrations with the old booking system were well documented as part of the scrutiny review. I am pleased to say that the new booking system is working really well and is much slicker. It is much easier for larger families to navigate and we have had positive feedback from parents and providers.”

Question 8

The following question was submitted by Cllr Marc Besford:

“Why did the minister for innovation recently visit?”

The Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care (Cllr Pauline Beall): responded with:

“Chris McDonald MP Stockton North was aware that Dr Zubir Ahmed MP (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Health and Social Care) was in the Borough for the opening of Fujifilm Biotechnologies and invited him to meet the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council, to discuss our Vision for the Tees Valley Care and Health Innovation Zone.

His visit demonstrates the national significance of our Vision, which has the potential to be game changing. By bringing together health, care, academic and industrial partners, we aim to drive innovation in diagnostics, digital technologies, workforce development and community-based health excellence. Work is already underway, and we have strong commitment from partners across the system.

We were encouraged by the Minister’s support across several critical areas which we hope will help accelerate progress and embed Stockton’s role and vision as the regional centre for Care and Health Innovation.”

Question 9

The following question was submitted by Cllr Eileen Johnson:

“Can I ask Cllr Richard Eglington about the recent public consultation into the Yarm Levelling up funding?”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing (Cllr Richard Eglington): responded with:

“The approved LUF programme was developed in response to the publication of LUF Round 1 application in 2021 with the objectives of delivering major proposals in Yarm and Eaglescliffe. The bid focussed on delivery of improvements to cultural facilities in, and enhancements to, Preston Park Museum and Grounds (PPMG), and public realm enhancements on Yarm High Street and delivery of cycleway connections in Yarm and Eaglescliffe.

The majority of the LUF programme has been delivered or is in construction with the successful redevelopment of Yarm Town Hall, completion of the Spence Building at Preston Park in September 2025, featuring a remodelled cafe and new toilets, additional parking and improvements to the Aviary and playground and work has commenced on the improved cycle link along Durham Lane to connect key employment sites and surrounding residential areas commenced.

The consultation on the remaining works to Yarm High Street concluded in January and the result was a clear consensus from the people of Yarm with 86% of

respondents do not in support the scheme. Residents also provided some alternative ideas to improve Yarm and at Cabinet last week we considered options for the use of the LUF funding that remains including consideration of the replacement of the Pontoons in the river. We thank the public for engaging and have asked officers to bring back costed viable options for the use of remaining funding, considering the ideas identified through the consultation.”

COU/91/25 Forward Plan and Leader’s Statement

“Thank you for attending Council tonight.

Our last full Council meeting took place on 18 February where the 2026/27 budget and indicative medium term financial plan were approved. Since then, Cabinet has met once, last week, on 12 March. It was a busy agenda, among the items discussed were:

- The final report of the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee on the Scrutiny Review of the Stockton-on-Tees Adult Carer’s Support Service
- The Adult Social Care Strategy for 2026-2030
- An update on the Round 1 Levelling Up Fund programme and Yarm High Street public realm scheme
- An update on the Accelerated Affordable housing delivery programme
- The decision records have been circulated to all Members and the minutes are available online.

The next Cabinet meeting is on 23 April 2026. So far among the items on the Forward Plan for that meeting are an update on the Central Stockton and North Thornaby Pride in Place Programme.

I have had the pleasure of being at Preston Hall many times recently, including viewing exhibitions and showing guests around. If you haven't been yet, make sure you plan a visit to this Easter. The new exhibition celebrating internationally acclaimed performer, La Voix, is on until June, showcasing the extraordinary career of one of the Borough's most successful entertainers.

La Voix has kindly loaned the museum a selection of her iconic costumes, accessories, photographs and personal memorabilia, giving visitors a rare glimpse into her celebrated career.

There will be a host of Easter themed activities too and the beautiful walled garden will reopen on 28 March for all to enjoy.

In the coming months our flagship regeneration project Stockton Waterfront urban park will open.

Stockton Waterfront is the latest chapter in the transformation of Stockton Town Centre. Once open, it will connect the town centre to the River Tees once more and will be an iconic new public space to host vibrant events, impressive play areas and heritage opportunities for residents and visitors.

The Borough is on the cusp of some of the biggest regeneration programmes of this generation and Stockton Waterfront is a huge opportunity to drive further change in the area for years to come.

The annual Mayor's Civic Awards will take place on 1 April at the Annual Meeting and will recognise those who have gone above and beyond helping to make Stockton-on-Tees a great place to live. It's always a celebration of everything that is good about Stockton-on-Tees and a great opportunity to highlight the amazing residents and organisations going out of their way to help boost community spirit.

At the Council's Annual Meeting on Wednesday 1 April, Councillor Richardson will use his final engagement as outgoing Mayor to honour the winners of the seven award categories.

I look forward to seeing you all there.”

Mayor