

Cabinet

A meeting of Cabinet was held on Thursday 14th May 2026.

Present: Cllr Lisa Evans (Leader of the Council), Cllr Pauline Beall (Cabinet Member), Cllr Clare Besford (Cabinet Member), Cllr Nigel Cooke (Cabinet Member), Cllr Richard Eglinton (Cabinet Member), Cllr Paul Rowling (Cabinet Member) and Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE (Cabinet Member).

Officers: Ged Morton, Peter Bell, Sarah Bowman-Abouna, Julie Butcher, Angela Connor, Tara Connor, Jane Edmonds, Simon Grundy, Majella McCarthy, Neil Mitchell, Iain Robinson and Marc Stephenson

Also in attendance: Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Stephen Dodds, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Niall Innes and Cllr Sylvia Walmsley.

Apologies: None.

CAB/129/25 Live Streaming

The Chair announced to those present that the meeting would be live streamed.

CAB/130/25 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

CAB/131/25 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

CAB/132/25 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 23 April 2026.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 April 2026 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

CAB/133/25 Place Select Committee - Scrutiny Review of Governance of Capital Projects

Consideration was given to a report that presented the outcomes of the Place Select Committee's review of Capital Projects.

The Council had a large-scale programme of capital projects to ensure that it was providing quality facilities for residents, attracting investment, and making Stockton-on-Tees a great place to live, work, and visit. The review aimed to examine the processes, including governance and decision-making structures, in delivering major capital projects and identify if these could be improved thereby ensuring that they provided value for money as well as having a social value and be effective in place shaping of the Borough.

The governance arrangements had been in place since November 2024, and the Committee found that these provided a solid foundation for delivering projects that benefit residents, support regeneration, and met the strategic ambitions of the Borough. The review highlighted a strong appetite to strengthen member engagement and the importance of learning from experience. The need to ensure sufficient skills and capacity to deliver the programme was also highlighted and Members were made aware of the development of the Council's workforce "People Plan". Recommendations therefore focused on communication, including strengthening the communication of risk and sharing of lessons learnt, and ensuring workforce capability, to further improve delivery.

The Committee had taken evidence from the Assistant Director of Town Centre Development, the Highways, Transport and Design Manager, the Strategic Finance Manager, the Capital Programme Manager, the Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth, and the Monitoring Officer.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The level of financial delegation given to officers in relation to capital projects be reviewed and any potential changes be taken through Cabinet and Council.
2. When making a decision Cabinet receive information that addresses the following:
 - option appraisal
 - public and stakeholder consultation and engagement
 - benefit identification
 - risk management
 - financial delegations
 - lessons learned from previous projects where appropriate
3. Member information for and engagement of the capital programme is strengthened by:
 - Providing regular and consistent updates to members via Cabinet/Member briefings showing progress against approved programme.
 - Including training for members on capital programme governance and funding frameworks within the Member Induction.
 - Refreshing the Council's Concordat for Communication and Consultation with Councillors to include the flow of information on the progress of capital projects particularly to relevant Ward Members.
4. Consideration be given within the ongoing development of the Council's People Plan of the need to ensure sufficient workforce capacity and skills to support the capital programme.
5. Officers provide a report on the effectiveness of the governance structure to the Select Committee in January 2027, when further projects have been through the process.

Consideration was given to a report that gave an update on the Powering our Future - Transformation Reviews.

The Council's Powering Our Future Programme provided a framework to modernise ways of working, focused on improving outcomes for residents, whilst ensuring the Council remained financially sustainable and resilient in the context of rising demand, budget pressures and increasing complexity. Powering Our Future included a Transformation Mission, and a series of reviews that sought to maximise use of resources, whilst continuing to support strong, inclusive and resilient communities across the Borough. Phase 1 of Transformation activity had already identified £9.9m of savings, and a number of key projects were in delivery.

The budget report to Council in February highlighted ongoing financial pressures arising from demand pressures and rising costs across several services, particularly Children's and Adults' Social Care, Home to School Transport and support for children with special educational needs. Demand was growing in both volume and complexity, while funding was not keeping pace with cost pressures, resulting in an estimated budget gap of £6.7m in 2026/27, rising to £13.8m in 2027/28 and £18.4m in 2028/29.

To address this, a second Phase of Transformation Reviews were introduced focused on day to day efficiencies, council wide initiatives and outcome based service reviews. The report provided Cabinet with an update on progress, and the contribution of activity towards closing the Medium Term Financial Plan budget gap. It focused primarily on Efficiency Reviews, where savings were front-loaded. Separate reports would be brought to Cabinet on the detail of Outcome-based Reviews as part of a planned approach and key milestones that ensured robust options and impact analysis.

RESOLVED that the progress of reviews to date and the activity towards closing the budget gap across the Medium Term Financial Plan be noted.

CAB/135/25 Yarm Levelling Up Fund (LUF)

Consideration was given to a report on Yarm Levelling Up Fund (LUF).

The report enabled Cabinet to reconsider its decision relating to the Yarm Levelling Up Fund (LUF) public realm proposals following a call in and subsequent consideration by the Executive Scrutiny Committee.

The call in forms part of the Council's constitutional arrangements for scrutiny of executive decision making and enables an executive decision to be paused and reconsidered where concerns were raised about the decision-making process.

On 22 April 2026, the Executive Scrutiny Committee considered the call in and resolved to refer the decision back to Cabinet for reconsideration, having identified matters relating to the clarity and presentation of the decision-making process that Cabinet was asked to have regard to.

The original Cabinet report and decision record were attached to the report.

At its meeting on 12 March 2026, Cabinet considered a report relating to the Yarm Levelling Up Fund (LUF) public realm proposals. The report set out the outcome of a

public engagement exercise in relation to the proposed High Street scheme, the wider financial context, and a range of options for the future use of the remaining funding.

Following consideration, Cabinet resolved to note the outcome of the public engagement, not to proceed with the scheme as originally proposed, and to reallocate the remaining funding. This included retaining a proportion of funding for locally focused schemes, with further development delegated accordingly.

The decision was subsequently called in in accordance with the Council's Constitution. The call in raised concerns relating to the presentation and interpretation of the engagement exercise, the extent to which its outcomes were reflected in the decision, and the clarity with which options and alternative approaches were presented.

On 22 April 2026, the Executive Scrutiny Committee considered the call in. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the call in met the constitutional requirements for validity and that the matters raised were capable of scrutiny within the Council's decision-making framework. The Committee then resolved to refer the decision back to Cabinet for reconsideration.

In referring the decision back, the Executive Scrutiny Committee identified matters for Cabinet to have regard to when reconsidering its decision. These matters related to the clarity and explanation of the decision-making process.

In summary, they concerned:

- how clearly the engagement exercise was presented and understood;
- how the purpose and status of that engagement were communicated;
- how engagement outcomes were interpreted and taken into account;
- the clarity with which options and alternative approaches were presented;
- the articulation of reasons for the decision; and
- the overall completeness and coherence of the information before Cabinet, including the relationship between engagement outcomes, financial considerations, and the decision taken.

Cabinet thanked Executive Scrutiny Committee for considering the call in and acknowledged scrutiny's legitimate constitutional role.

Cabinet carefully reflected on the matters referred back and gave the following comments:-

- Residents gave a very clear message that they did not support the specific High Street scheme that was consulted upon.
- Cabinet had listened to that message and, importantly, the Council was not proceeding with that scheme.
- This was not a case of Cabinet ignoring consultation feedback. The consultation directly informed the decision not to proceed.
- It was important to remember the wider context of the original Levelling Up Fund programme.

- The LUF allocation for what was then the Stockton South constituency was always a broader regeneration package across Yarm; Eaglescliffe and Preston Park and not simply one standalone scheme in Yarm.
- Significant investment has already been delivered or committed:
 - Yarm Town Hall restoration
 - Preston Park improvements
 - Transport and connectivity infrastructure
- Government's revised funding arrangements explicitly allow flexibility and reprioritisation within the programme.
- Cabinet therefore had to balance:
 - engagement feedback
 - deliverability
 - value for money
 - prudence
 - and the Council's wider financial position
- It was entirely reasonable and responsible to avoid borrowing where existing funding flexibility allows projects already within the wider programme to be funded directly.
- That is the same prudent approach most residents would expect any organisation to take.
- This did not mean Yarm had lost out. Cabinet deliberated retained funding with Yarm and further engagement would take place regarding local priorities, including such projects as the pontoons.
- If future proposals come forward where borrowing represents a sensible and economically justified approach, clearly those matters can be considered in the future on their merits.
- Cabinet must make decisions based on the circumstances before it and on responsible stewardship of public money.
- It was recognised that some Members and residents would have preferred a different outcome and those views were respected.

Having reconsidered the matter carefully in the light of the issues raised through the scrutiny process, Cabinet remained satisfied that the original decision was balanced, proportionate and in the wider public interest. Therefore, the original Cabinet decision was confirmed.

RESOLVED that the original Cabinet decision was confirmed.

CAB/136/25 Stockton-on-Tees Local Plan

Consideration was given to a report on the Stockton-on-Tees Local Plan.

In January 2024, in accordance with Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, a five-year review of the Local Plan concluded that a full update through a new Local Plan was required. Council agreed that progressing a new Local Plan under the emerging plan-making system was the most robust and cost-effective approach.

The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 came into force on 25 March 2026, introducing a new regulatory framework for the preparation of Local Plans, Minerals and Waste Plans, and Supplementary Plans.

The report sought Council's agreement to commence a new Local Plan in accordance with the 2026 Regulations, authorising all required elements to allow for progression through the 'getting ready' stage, including giving a notice of intention to MHCLG by 31 December 2026, and meeting all the necessary requirements to enable the commencement of Gateway 1 by 30 April 2027.

The report also sought approval to establish a cross-party consultative and advisory steering group to support the Local Plan process.

Cabinet RESOLVED that:-

1. The commencement of a new Local Plan be endorsed.

and recommends that Council agrees to the following;

RECOMMENDED to Council that:-

2. Council approves the commencement of a full update of the Stockton on Tees Local Plan in accordance with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) as amended and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026.
3. Council delegates the preparation, publication and submission of a 'Notice of intention to commence the Stockton on Tees Local Plan' to the Director of Regeneration & Inclusive Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing and that this will be made available in accordance with the Local Plan Timetable and no later than September 2026.
4. Council approves the preparation and submission of an updated Local Plan Timetable in broad accordance with Appendix 1 and authorises its submission to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and its publication.
5. Council delegates authority to the Director of Inclusive Growth and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member to update and publish the Local Plan Timetable monthly or as required, to ensure an up-to-date timetable is publicly available in accordance with Regulation 6 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026.
6. Council approves the commencement of a Design Guide Supplementary Plan to comply with the requirement of Section 15B and 15F(1) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and delegates authority to the Director

of Inclusive Growth and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing to produce a draft document for consultation.

7. Council authorises officers to explore the preparation of a Joint Minerals and Waste Plan with neighbouring Local Planning Authorities and delegate to the Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing, the responsibility for all matters relating to Stockton-on-Tees Borough, including;

- the commissioning of an associated evidence base (as necessary);
- develop a 'Joint Minerals and Waste Plan agreement' under section 151 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) as amended;
- develop a Minerals and Waste Plan Timetable;
- undertake a 'scoping consultation' on the joint Tees Valley Minerals and Waste Local Plan; and
- produce all associated documentation to allow to progress the joint Tees Valley Minerals and Waste Local Plan to progress through Gateway 1.

8. Council delegates authority to the Director of Inclusive Growth and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing, to agree commencement of the scoping consultation for the Local Plan which will:

- provide an opportunity for residents, community groups, businesses and other interested parties to register to be notified of Local Plan updates, via the Council website;
- consultation taking place in accordance with the Local Plan Regulations;
- consultation material being made publicly available; and
- a consultation plan being produced prior to Gateway 1 after having regard to comments made during the statutory scoping consultation.

9. Council delegates authority to the Director of Inclusive Growth and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing, to undertake all necessary steps to inform and prepare the documents for the Gateway 1 self-assessment which may include commissioning evidence, undertaking a call for sites and preparing draft vision, Local Plan content and consultation plan, on the proposed local plan.

10. Council approves the formation of a cross-party consultative and advisory Members working group in broad accordance with the draft Terms of Reference at Appendix 2 to support the Local Plan process.

CAB/137/25 Houses in Multiple Occupation Supplementary Planning Document and Article 4 Direction

Consideration was given to a report on Houses in Multiple Occupation Supplementary Planning Document and Article 4 Direction.

The report outlined activities undertaken in the preparation and consultation on a Houses in Multiple Occupation Supplementary Planning Document and Article 4 Direction following the resolution of Cabinet / Council in January 2026. The report sought adoption of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Supplementary Planning Document and outlined the next steps in relation to confirmation of the Article 4 Direction.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation SPD (Appendix A of the report) had been prepared following the resolution of Council in January 2026 and if adopted would apply to planning applications for new houses of multiple occupation whether that be a new build or through the conversion of an existing property. The document had been produced to ensure proposals for Houses of Multiple Occupation contributed positively to making places better for people, improving standards of accommodation, and reducing detrimental impacts on neighbours. It assisted in the interpretation of policies within the Stockton-on-Tees Local Plan and sets out guidance and good practice for planning applicants to enable the delivery of better planning outcomes.

The SPD had been prepared in accordance with Government legislation and guidance and had been subject to public consultation in accordance with regulations. The public consultation period on the draft SPD took place between 19th March and the 17th April 2026. A total of 13 responses were received on the contents of the draft SPD.

These responses could be summarised as falling into 3 categories:

- Organisations- Natural England, Coal Authority, Home Office, Prism Planning, North Yorkshire Council, Historic England
- Local Resident- 6 local residents
- Ward Councillor- one response

A consultation statement (Appendix B of the report) had been prepared which contained comments / main issues raised alongside the council's response to them.

Also provided were screening assessments in relation to the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) have been undertaken and are available within Appendix C and D of the report respectively.

It was recommended that the SPD document (Appendix A of the report) and its technical appendices (Appendices B to D of the report), be adopted which would enable them to be a material consideration in planning applications for relevant proposals. Following adoption, the documents would be made available in the Council's main office, on the Council's website and in public libraries across the Borough. Members should also be aware that legislation makes provision for individuals / organisations to pursue a legal challenge regarding SPDs, and this would end 3-months after adoption of the documents.

In accordance with The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (Commencement No. 11 and Saving and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2026 the Council can adopt Supplementary Planning Documents until 30th June 2026. Adopted SPDs would continue to be a material consideration but they would cease to have effect upon adoption of a new Local Plan.

Following the resolution of Cabinet in January 2026, notice had been given that the Council had made a Direction under Article 4(1) of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended). Notice was given on 18th March 2026, and a period of consultation was undertaken from 19th March and the 17th April 2026.

If confirmed the direction would require planning consent for the change of use of a building within Class C3 (dwelling houses) to a use falling within Class C4 (houses in multiple occupation) through the removal of permitted development rights for this type of development. The Direction would apply to the entire area of the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees.

During the consultation period 18 representations were received. These responses could be summarised as falling into 2 categories:

- Organisations- Natural England, Coal Authority, Home Office, Prism Planning, National Residential Landlords Association, Stockton Liberal Democrats, The Canal & River Trust, North Yorkshire Council, Historic England.
- Local Resident- 9 local residents

These representations must be taken into account by the local planning authority in deciding whether to confirm the direction. Having considered and taken into account the representations received (which are available within Appendix H of the report), the local planning authority intends to confirm the Article 4 Direction. Necessary processes would be undertaken, in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) to confirm the Direction which would come into force on Monday 22nd March 2027.

Cabinet RESOLVED that:

1. The contents of the report be noted.
2. The comments of Planning Committee in relation to the Houses in Multiple Occupation Supplementary Planning Document be noted.

Recommended to Council that:-

3. Council notes and considers comments of Planning Committee in relation to the Houses in Multiple Occupation Supplementary Planning Document.
4. The adoption of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Supplementary Planning Document (Appendix A) and its accompanying technical appendices (Appendices B to D).
5. Delegation of the authority to approve non-material and minor alterations to the SPD and its accompanying technical appendices to the Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing, prior to publication.

CAB/138/25 Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Consent Street Trading Policy Review 2026

Consideration was given to a report on Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Consent Street Trading Policy Review 2026.

The whole Borough had been designated as a consent area for the purposes of street trading. The Consent Street Trading (CST) policy details how the regime was managed. The policy document had been reviewed following a valid petition, a public consultation and comments received from the general licensing committee.

The CST regime had been in place since 1 March 2024. Over 60 consents had been considered and granted across Stockton-on-Tees since the beginning of the scheme.

The CST policy guided the Council when it considered applications for street trading consents. It also served to inform applicants of the criteria against which applications

would be considered as well as setting out the Councils framework and approach for the management of street trading in the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees.

A petition asking for certain events to be excluded from the regime was received and duly considered at full council on 19th November 2026. It was moved by Councillor Norma Stephenson, seconded by Councillor Naill Innes that the petition be referred to the General Licensing Committee for further consideration.

The CST policy was subsequently reviewed and included several changes in response to the valid petition, operational procedures and comments received from General Licensing Committee including recommendations.

As part of this review, a public consultation was also undertaken to help inform the changes. The responses received to the public consultation were available to Members.

The review also considered the design principals:

- Put communities at the heart of everything we do - sensitive to the needs of residents, provides diversity and consumer choice.
- Has a 'place-based' approach - compliments regeneration and business growth.
- Has efficient processes and be digital by design - process reviews and feedback provide efficiencies.
- Uses data and intelligence to inform our decision - consultation drives the policy framework.

The matter was referred to the General Licensing Committee on the 24th March 2026. The committee agreed unanimously on the revised CST policy. The simplification of the CST process was acknowledged along with a new fairer criterion for commercial, charity and hobbyists trading at events within the borough.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The report be noted.

RECOMMENDED to Council that:-

2. The proposed consent street trading policy document be agreed.

CAB/139/25 Anti-Poverty Action Plan Update 2026

Consideration was given to a report on Anti-Poverty Action Plan Update 2026.

The report and appendix outlined the progress made by the Council and partners since the Anti-Poverty Strategy and Action Plan were adopted by Cabinet in July 2024. It highlighted the work undertaken across the Council during this time to address poverty in the Borough and gave examples of achievements across the four key areas identified in the Strategy.

The Anti-Poverty Strategy and Action Plan was co-produced with local partner organisations and residents with lived experience; it sets out the Council's commitment to reducing inequality and poverty in the Borough. Over the last 18 months, the Anti-Poverty Strategy Delivery Group had met regularly to coordinate

actions undertaken by both internal and external partners. The Positive Living Forum, previously named the Anti-Poverty Lived Experience Group, continued to meet six-weekly to feed in residents' experiences and to evaluate the work being carried out by the Council and its partners.

Appendix A of the report provided examples of highlights from each of the four priority areas. A notable achievement for each area is summarised below, with further detail, testimonies and photographs provided in Appendix A of the report.

- Household Poverty: The Bread-and-Butter Thing (TBBT) supports residents at five volunteer run hubs across the Borough. During 2025, residents saved over £339,738 by shopping with TBBT and there has been a significant decrease in the number of emergency food parcels since the scheme's introduction.
- Child Poverty: The Free School Meals Auto-Enrolment Project has resulted in almost 400 pupils being auto-enrolled for free school meals in 2025, with an increase in almost £500,000 in pupil premium for schools across the Borough.
- Participation and Voice: As previously noted the Positive Living Forum meets every six weeks. Their experiences have guided new initiatives and helped the Council shape services.
- Health and Wellbeing: 68 Community Spaces and 10 Warm Welcome venues provide welcoming places across the Borough for residents to connect with each other, try new things and access advice and support. This is helping to reduce social isolation and loneliness, supporting residents to stay well for longer.

Further detail on the ongoing approach was detailed within Appendix A of the report. In summary key actions would include:

- Co-production of an updated action plan (for the remaining 18 months of the strategy). Any outstanding objectives will be carried forward onto the updated plan.
- Continued engagement with our partners, including the Positive Living Forum and the Anti-Poverty Delivery Group, alongside our wider network of Community Partnerships and organisations to identify and agree these renewed actions.
- A further progress report would be presented back to Cabinet at the end of the next 18-month period.

RESOLVED that the report and actions taken to address and alleviate poverty during the 18-month period from July 2024 be noted.

CAB/140/25 Adult Social Care Fees and Charges Consultation

Consideration was given to a report on Adult Social Care Fees and Charges Consultation.

A Council's Adult Social Care Charging Policy outlined how they would charge for care and support, ensuring that charges were fair and based on a financial assessment.

The aims of a Charging Policy that was applied consistently to everyone with eligible adult social care needs were to ensure that people were not charged more than they could afford, and to ensure that the process was transparent and equitable.

Adult Social Care provided a range of financial management services for people in receipt of services at no cost to the individual. These services required a significant amount of resource and capacity to ensure the Council was meeting requirements and managing individual's finances appropriately. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council was one of the last Local Authorities in the region and across the national landscape who did not apply administration and management costs against these services.

The Council already applied charges to individuals who were in receipt of Court appointed Deputyship. Local authority financial deputyship was a court appointed role under the Mental Capacity Act 2005 that authorised the Council to manage the property and financial affairs of an adult who lacked mental capacity and had no suitable person able to act on their behalf. The appointment was made by the Court of Protection and allowed the local authority to undertake ongoing financial management, such as paying bills, managing income and assets, and meeting care charges, within the specific powers granted by the court and subject to statutory oversight by the Office of the Public Guardian. For those people who had a court appointed deputy for property and finance the Council charged the following amounts:

- Application Fee: £421
- Hearing Fee (if required): £259

Deputyship costs

- Deputyship work up to order £745.00
- Subsequent years is £824 for net assets over £20,300.00 and up to 3.5% of net assets below £20,300.00.
- OPG report £216.00.
- Basic HMRC return: £89
- Property management, HMRC, travel and other claimable costs are only where applicable and have very limited scope of when they can be claimed.

As a result, the Council wanted to ensure equity of charging across several financial management services and therefore undertake a public consultation to introduce a new fees and charge policy. As this was a significant change to policy and approach there was a requirement for the local authority to consult with the public to ensure open and transparent decision making. Adult Social Care had had a working group including finance officers exploring this at a national and regional level to ensure any proposed charges were reasonable and appropriate and in line with others.

The consultation would be an open consultation with all residents of Stockton and would be available on the council website, via a survey. This would cover the proposed fees for Appointee charges and deceased estates. Accessibility requirements were being built in, including multiple response formats and support for people who required reasonable adjustments. All people who were being supported with appointeeship within Stockton Council would be advised of the consultation process (via letter or telephone call) and supported to respond if they require it. Drop-in sessions would also be available for the public to attend, and support would be offered at these. All communication was available both in accessible format and easy read format.

These charges would provide a forecasted income of £167,000 in year one rising to £386,000 in year three. The Council was facing a difficult budget gap, and this income would support the sustainability of the service offer in the future.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The commencement of consultation on the proposed introduction of fees and charges as set out in this report be authorised.
2. Authority be delegated to the Director of Adults, Health and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing, to agree and introduce a Care Charging Policy subject to the outcome of the consultation.

CAB/141/25 Strategic Commissioning Board – Corporate Approach

Consideration was given to a report on Strategic Commissioning Board – Corporate Approach.

In Summer 2025, Powering Our Future Board (POF Board) approved a review of strategic commissioning across key directorates of the Council. The Project initiation Document (PID) set out the scope and focus for this review, identifying key outcomes including ensuring strategic approach to commissioning were aligned to priorities and medium-term financial plan, a focus on early intervention and prevention, and longer-term reduction of high-cost packages of care, reduced duplication across services, stronger partnerships and collaboration across services where there were mutual agreements, trust and transparency and increased value for money.

A cross directorate working group (colleagues across Children's, Adults, Public Health, Housing & A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees, Procurement and Finance) was stood up in the Summer of 2025 and had completed a baseline assessment of governance, leadership, finance, capacity, capability and maturity against the current strategic commissioning cycle at both a macro and micro level.

This baseline identified areas of good practice and opportunities to strengthen corporate oversight and steer across key areas of the commissioning cycle, including assessment of need, designing outcomes, strategic planning, value for money, service transformation, and monitoring/improvement.

The proposed approach to achieving this was the introduction of a new approach to commissioning, working towards and implementing a new Target Operating Model (TOM). This would be underpinned by a new Strategic Commissioning Board, comprising of senior officers with appropriate decision making authority, that would work within the schemes of delegation and provide the Council with greater management and oversight and commissioning of the local services. Key decisions would remain the decision of Cabinet and regular reports from the Commissioning Board will be presented to Cabinet.

RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted and the direction of travel be approved including:

- The Strategic Commissioning Board will be stood up and begin work on identifying priority areas of work. In addition, work will begin on working towards a more integrated model of commissioning for health and care.
- The annual commissioning report will be drafted and produced for April 2027.

- A quarterly report will be presented to the Corporate Management Team for assurance and oversight.

CAB/142/25 Public Health Grant Spend

Consideration was given to a report Public Health Grant Spend.

Through an outcome-based review, £1m of the public health grant had been identified to realign to other areas of the Council. The work builds on existing joint working between Public Health and other services across the Council. Working with Finance, the proposed Council areas to receive realigned funding had been identified. Further work was commencing on specific public health indicators to be achieved through discussion with the relevant service areas. To satisfy Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) assurance requirements, service level agreements would articulate joint working in each Council area, use of funding and indicators which must demonstrate specific public health added value.

DHSC had implemented a new strengthened national assurance process, regarding spend of the Public Health grant (Appendix 1 of the report). To satisfy the assurance process, written evidence in the form of service level agreements (SLAs) was required to demonstrate specific added value through use of the Public Health grant in achieving Public Health outcomes. National guidance stipulated areas / activity the grant cannot be used for, including other areas of Council statutory activity. Through this process, DHSC also sought to determine there was an appropriate balance between funding Public Health core services, and wider Council activity supporting Public Health. All areas across Tees Valley and the North East were putting or had put SLAs in place. Comparison across Councils on wider use of the grant had limited value due to: nationally recognised variation in spend captured in budget reported outturn (RO) categories; and significant variation in set-up, scope and ways of working of wider Council services.

Public Health already worked closely with a wide range of Council areas and public health funding was used across these services. In 2025/26 a total of £4.2m expenditure across other Council services and central overheads was forecast to be funded via public health, with £3.5m being funded through the public health grant and £0.7m funded through public health reserves (Appendix 2 of the report).

The Council areas receiving public health funding had been reviewed through joint working with Finance, to ensure that they were in line with the DHSC assurance requirements and to make sure that the funding could continue through public health grant funding as the public health reserve was drawn down. Some of the existing public health contributions would be reduced and others would increase. The exact amounts of funding for each service would be determined once public health indicators had been specified, to ensure the funding reflected joint working and public health added value but would include:

- Trading standards, enforcement
- Employment & training, inclusive growth, economic and place development
- Parks and green space, active travel
- Homelessness (complex lives) and communities, engagement & consultation
- Workplace health

The public health outcomes linked to these areas were detailed at Appendix 3 of the report.

Some areas funded by Public Health had historically been funded through reserves; these were now being covered through core Public Health grant. The total contribution would increase from £4.2m to £4.5m and this would be funded in full from the Public Health grant in future years. Therefore, the Public Health grant contribution would increase from £3.5m in 2025/26 to £4.5m from 2026/27 (Appendix 4). If £1m of the Public Health grant was not used in this way to fund other services providing public health outcomes then this would create a budget pressure the Council would have to meet from elsewhere.

Discussions would now take place with relevant Directors / Assistant Directors to maximise joint working through the proposed spend, to deliver specific public health indicators. Service Level Agreements (SLAs) would be required for all the spend across areas of the Council beyond Public Health, including both existing areas of spend and proposed new areas.

Discussions were ongoing with neighbouring Local Authorities to share good practice regarding SLAs, to inform our local approach. The SLA would be tested in one or two service areas, in conversation with the Assistant Director / service lead. It was proposed Public Health indicators in the SLA would mirror and complement existing indicators wherever possible and that they would be built in to reporting mechanisms working with the corporate performance team.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The update on delivering the Public Health grant outcomes-based review be noted.
2. The wider Council areas where public health funding is planned to be realigned, to achieve public health outcomes be noted.
3. The mechanism for evidencing outcomes and spend to satisfy national assurance requirements be noted.

CAB/143/25 Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Biodiversity Duty Report 2025/26

Consideration was given to a report Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Biodiversity Duty Report 2025/26.

As part of the Environment Act 2021, all Local Authorities and Local Planning Authorities within England were required to demonstrate how they had met the enhanced Biodiversity Duty.

This ensured that Local Authorities were working towards the delivery of the Environmental Improvement Plan for England, with government commitments to halt the decline in species abundance and protect 30% of UK land and sea by 2030, with greater commitments to be met by 2042.

A requirement to produce and publish a Biodiversity Duty Report every 5 years had been issued by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The report included actions undertaken within the current reporting period, commitments to

deliver within the next reporting period and Biodiversity Net Gain data from the Local Planning Authority.

RESOLVED that the draft Biodiversity Duty Report, including commitment to future actions, be approved for publication.

CAB/144/25 Foster with North East Expansion

Consideration was given to a report on Foster with North East Expansion.

The purpose of the report was to seek Cabinet approval for the Council to take part in the expansion of the Regional Fostering Hub in line with the Department for Education (DfE) expansion programme. This would build on the Foster with North East (FwNE) pathfinder that had been in operation since 2023 and all North East Councils were part of, but also required a move to an 'End-to-End' model encompassing all aspects of the Fostering process.

Children in Care sufficiency was the most significant risk and financial pressure to Councils across the North East and nationally. Following the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in 2022 national policy, supported by proposed legislation in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, had identified regional working as key to addressing these challenges. The Competitions and Market Authority (CMA) had also reported that the current model was dysfunctional driving up costs and delivering poor outcomes.

DfE was progressing at pace on this agenda publishing a blueprint including regional fostering, *Renewing Fostering: homes for 10,000 more children*, in February 2026 and guidance on the next stage of development for Regional Care Co-operatives (RCCs) in March 2026 Apply to set up a regional care cooperative - GOV.UK along with an Expression of Interest (Eoi) for six further regions to become RCC's.

Foster with North East (FwNE) was established in 2023 as the National Fostering Pathfinder, hosted by Together for Children and with all 12 councils in the region participating. An evaluation of FwNE was carried out last year and it was recognised that expansion of the model to an End-to-End approach was essential to achieve the benefits of the regional approach. It was positive that national policy and some additional funding had now aligned with that view.

DfE policy statement sets out seven minimum requirements for an expanded Regional Fostering Hub along with a specification and very tight timelines to establish and implement the model. A fully costed plan needed to be submitted to DfE by 1st June 2026. The work undertaken in the region to develop the model, financial planning and implementation are set out in the body of this report.

DfE provided over £2m of funding to FwNE to establish it and for initial running costs, however in 2025-26 the current model was fully funded by the 12 LAs through a population-based formula. In 2026-27 it's projected that the model would cost approximately £2m with £500k of funding through government grant. A commitment had been made that the financial contributions from individual LA's would be maintained at 2025/26 levels, and the efficiencies would be sought to support the expansion of the Hub. For context in 2023-24 the region spent £540m on children in care placements and costs continued to rise at an exponential rate. Financial details were set out in the body of the report.

To ensure the benefits of regional working were fully realised and operated as efficiently as possible it was proposed that FwNE would be fully integrated into a proposed North East RCC. It was recommended that a regional bid be submitted as part of the RCC EoI by May 22nd, building on extensive work that had taken place regionally over the last 18 months. If successful it would bring at least £1.5m additional funding into the region and enable significant efficiency and benefits by integrating with FwNE.

A high-level structure for regional working through a proposed RCC and delivery of FwNE via a locality model was described in detail in the report. Whilst it would be required to operate across a full regional footprint of all 12 LA's our design is based on 3 Locality delivery teams taking the learning from FwNE pathfinder. It was proposed that the 3 localities were:

- North Locality – Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland
- Central Locality – Durham, South Tyneside and TfC/Sunderland
- South Locality – Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesborough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees.

The report presented a clear rationale for the recommendations and the move to regional arrangements to address chronic shortfalls in sufficiency of children in care placements. The risks presented by the current dysfunctional market approach impacting on children's outcomes and the financial sustainability of LA's must be addressed and this work provided an opportunity to do so.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The Local Authority enter into an agreement to be part of the expanded North East Fostering Hub in line with national policy and guidance.
2. The Local Authority support a North East Regional bid to become a 'Wave 2' RCC national pathfinder and support submission of a bid to DfE by 22nd May 2026.
3. The Director of Children's Services in conjunction with the Lead Member for Children's Services be authorised to take all necessary steps to implement the recommendations in line with National Policy.