

People Select Committee

A meeting of People Select Committee was held on Monday 11th May 2026.

Present: Cllr Marilyn Surtees (Chair), Cllr Paul Weston (Vice-Chair), Cllr John Coulson (sub Cllr John Gardner), Cllr Mohammed Mazi (sub Cllr Niall Innes), Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Hugo Stratton

Officers: Michael Mackin (Atomix), Vanessa Housley (Children's Services), Sam Dixon (Adults, Health & Wellbeing), Ged Morton, Viv Latimer, Michelle Gunn, John Devine (Corporate Services)

Also in attendance: Cllr Paul Rowling

Apologies: Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley & Cllr Barry Woodhouse

PEO/6/26 Livestreaming

The Committee noted the livestreaming procedure.

PEO/7/26 Evacuation Procedure

The Committee noted the evacuation and housekeeping procedure.

PEO/8/26 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

PEO/9/26 Minutes

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 13 April be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

PEO/10/26 Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Provision

The Committee received a presentation regarding the Post 16 Partnership Transitions Working Strand from the Head of Centre at Stockton Sixth Form College. The presentation included:

- The importance of providing early advice and guidance using a shared language and messaging, e.g. in Year 9 when young people choose their GCSE options, to build knowledge and understanding of the pathways available at post-16. This would encourage young people to make earlier decisions about colleges and courses rather than leaving it until later and choosing courses that may not be right for them. The proactivity of the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) in the last two years, working with schools and colleges to promote post-16 choices and provision, was praised.
- Transport was a major influence on the choice of post-16 provider, with young people choosing colleges that were easier or quicker to get to. It was found that if a young people lived within walking distance of a college, that was their

destination of choice. For others, depending on where the student lived, it could be easier for them to get public transport to providers outside of the Borough e.g. via one direct bus, rather than those inside the Borough where it was possible that they needed to take more than one bus.

- Friendship groups was also a considerable influence on young people's choices, however it had been found that when young people attended college their friendship groups changed, and some realise the course was not for them. In these cases, young people who had left the Borough for their course may return.
- Exit interviews were conducted for those who left courses and the reasons why students came to a college from another provider was also captured. Retention was measured from September for at least six weeks, and for some providers into November, as this was the timeframe students were most likely to change providers or courses.
- Collaborative work to support vulnerable learners and break down barriers was taking place. SBC were working really well with providers to ensure that they had the information they needed to help those young people "land" at the right provider, building relationship with young people to assist in their transition to post-16 provision, and therefore be more likely to stay on the course.
- Greater clarity was needed for sharing of data and communication to ensure that young people were integrated quickly into colleges and any barriers were removed. SBC were ensuring providers were receiving accurate and timely information both before and when GCSE results were released to try to ensure that all young people had a place in post-16 provision and assist with the transition.
- Data sharing systems would only collect the information that was needed and not information over and above, to ensure compliance with data protection legislation. Providers were working to understand how to explain to students and their families who did not want to share their data the reasons why it was needed and how to make them to feel safe to do so.
- The Post-16 transitions survey key findings emphasised the importance of travel for young people when making their decisions, as well as early communication. The offer of post-16 provision was competitive, with different routes e.g. A level, vocational, apprenticeship. The survey would be repeated in the next academic year, and it was hoped that the percentage of students staying local would be increased.
- Providers were working with SBC to ensure skills and requirements needed by local industry were covered.
- Events and engagement that involved Year 9 students was crucial to ensure that they were better informed when making their decisions in Year 11.
- Since the Post-16 partnership collaboration, attendance to events and applications had increased, however students were applying for more than one provider, both within and outside of the Borough.

The Committee discussed the importance of transport, including knowing the local bus routes and issues that arose when a student missed their bus or a bus was late. It was suggested that advertising transport routes early would be useful and may impact on retention. It was noted that information and messages on transport was shared, not only with potential student but also with parents/carers who needed to feel confident their young person was safe. This not only included sharing bus timetables, but for Stockton Sixth Form Colleges there were free buses to Thornaby and Ingleby Barwick for students along with free bus passes. However, there were economic challenges for doing so. The Post-16 Partnership was due to meet with SBC's Strategic Transport

Manager to discuss transport issues with a view to influence the strategic planning of transport both locally and regionally.

Social media was raised, and it was noted that providers were communicating to young people on a broad range of social media channels including Tiktok which was currently the main channel for young people. There was a challenge, however, to ensure that the use language that young people would engage with.

AGREED the information be noted.

PEO/11/26 Progress Update - Review of Disabled Facilities Grants

The Committee considered a progress update including assessments of progress following implementation of the recommendations from the Scrutiny Review of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). This was the second update to be presented to the Committee, noting progress with the eight outstanding recommendations, two of which had been achieve and four on track.

Recommendations four and five, regarding arrangements with Registered Providers and producing a register of adapted properties, had slipped due to ongoing discussions with Thirteen taking longer than expected. However there had been progress made and the process agreed. Development on the register had started, with five years of data, but it was important to also get data from the Registered Providers. In addition, landlord applications were being promoted, engaging with Thirteen, North Star and Accent to start with. The benefits of landlord application were that the tenant would not been means tested by the Council and placed on the waiting list, but there was still scrutiny from the DFG team to ensure the DFG specification met the need. A pilot was being held with North Star, and the first landlord application had been put through. Case Studies would be developed after a year of the pilot to promote to other registered providers in the area.

AGREED the Progress Update be noted, and the assessment of progress be confirmed. The next progress update would be presented in six months.

PEO/12/26 Overview Report: Corporate Services and Revenues, Benefits and Welfare Services

The Committee received an overview report from the Director of Corporate Services which provided details of key achievements and challenges in 2025-2026 for the different services within this area and the emerging issues. Key points highlighted included:

- Corporate Services had a wide range of functions including governance, legal, elections, workforce, communications, performance, risk, and digital, and while these were seen to be back-office services it was emphasised that without them the front line could not operate. The functions being carried out supported colleagues and service from all directorates.
- Being accessible to residents was important for the Council and that included both social media presence and ensuring that the website could be accessed by people with different needs. There had been 1.6 million social media impression in April 2006, and the website had a high accessibility score of 99.6%.

- The Service was also involved in modernising the Council, putting in place a new corporate governance compliance system, project management tools, and performance clinics.
- Work was ongoing with Team Stockton, which was a collection of public sector bodies such as Police and Health as well as others, to share data and information which would assist in better understanding where pressures were coming from and what was affecting residents.
- Implementation of livestream meetings had been very complex to ensure that it was properly accessible and streamlined for all residents to view.
- Engagement with young people was taking place to ensure that they were registering to vote in future elections and aware of the democratic processes.
- The approach to recruitment had been updated to attract the best quality of staff in what was now a challenging and competitive market. A recent example was carrying out recruitment in-house for the Director of Neighbourhoods post rather than buying executive recruitment and research. A recruitment video for the Council was also shown which showcased the variety of careers available. Workforce wellbeing, development, and engagement was also important to retain staff.
- There was a high expectation from residents for more openness and transparency, and this was reflected in a higher number of Freedom of Information requests being received along with a higher number of Data Subject Access Requests.

The Cabinet member for Resources and Transport highlighted key points from the overview report for Revenues, Benefits, and Welfare members had received with their agenda, which included:

- There had been investment in digital software to ensure effective administration of council tax collection and business rates and identifying households not claiming welfare they were entitled to such as pension credit which had generated over £1.2million in support to 270 households.
- There had been work carried out to identify where circumstances had changed for single occupancy Council Tax discounts, property valuations, occupied properties and small business rates relief to ensure that not only was the Council receiving the income it should, but residents and businesses were getting the support that they need.
- There had been a change in the billing system, replacing emails for electronic bill with the online portal, which was more secure, and nearly 60% of residents had signed up to the portal.
- The North East Council Tax Care Leavers scheme, giving support for eligible care leavers up to the age of 25, which the Council had taken a lead on designing and implementing, had been rolled out across the North East Authorities.
- The Household Support Fund had enabled the Council to assist 26,000 residents on low incomes. This included choosing to provide vouchers to care leavers and adult carers, giving recognition from the Council to adult carers of the massive role they play in society.
- There had been a high number of changes in welfare taking place which was a challenge, and the Council along with local authorities across the country would be working with the Department for Work and Pensions to implement these. The government had also changed the rules regarding how residents could pay council tax, and this was something to be managed.

The Cabinet member also reminded members that if they had any queries regarding Council Tax or benefits from their residents, these could be forwarded to either himself or the Service for a response.

The Committee gave positive feedback on the recruitment video and highlighted the importance of digitalisation as well as the move towards livestreaming meetings to increase transparency and communication with residents.

An officer from the SBC Strategic Planning Team was also in attendance and briefly outline how future performance information would be presented. Work was ongoing to finalise key performance indicators (KPIs) linked to the Stockton-on-Tees Plan, and reporting would involve the relaying of tier 1 measure (Council outcomes) bi-annually to Cabinet and annually to the Executive Scrutiny Committee and Full Council. Tier 2 measure (service outcomes and progress update, including data that supports SBC strategies/plans) would be reported bi-annually to the five Select Committees, with the first due to be presented to People Select Committee in December 2026.

AGREED that the Overview Reports be noted.

PEO/13/26 Chair's Update and Work Programme 2026-2027

The Chair and Vice-Chair had attended the Post-16 Partnership that took place on 11 May, which included presentations and reports regarding funding, UCAS, and the transport impact of Every Child Achieving and Thriving White Paper. It was felt that the Partnership was focused on outcomes and opportunities for young people. It was further suggested that, from the meeting attended, the Partnership was very affective and achieving their goals, making real improvements for post-16 provision.

Consideration was given to the Committee's work programme.

AGREED the Chairs update and work programme be noted.

Chair: