

Executive Scrutiny Committee

A meeting of Executive Scrutiny Committee was held on Tuesday 21st July 2026.

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

Officers: Clare Harper, Lisa Tague, Judy Trainer, Gary Woods and Michelle Gunn

Also in attendance: None

Apologies: None

ESC/16/26 Livestreaming

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

ESC/17/26 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

ESC/18/26 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

ESC/19/26 Minutes

AGREED that the minutes of the meeting on 19 May 2026 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

ESC/20/26 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Outturn March 2026

The report provided an update on the financial performance and position as at 31 March 2026.

The overall financial position remained broadly consistent with that projected at the end of December 2025, as outlined in the budget report in February 2026, with a minor overall variance of (£72,000) from the previously reported position of £3.937m. The final year-end position reflected an overspend against budget of £3.865m.

During the financial year, pressure continued across the largest demand-driven services, namely Adults' and Children's Social Care, Home to School Transport, and support for children with Special Educational Needs. These areas were the focus of ongoing transformation reviews.

In the final quarter of the financial year, there was a notable improvement in the projected financial position across most budget areas. Improvements against earlier forecasts across directorate budgets enabled the Council to ring-fence the required

10% (£1.7m) for Special Educational Needs without the need to identify further savings. However, there was a worsening position in Children's Social Care and a significant increase in the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit, which rose to £17.1m, driven primarily by continued growth in the number of children with Education, Health and Care Plans.

The Capital Programme was updated to reflect the inclusion of new schemes and the completion of projects as at the financial year end.

Key issues highlighted and discussed were as follows:

- With reference to the 700k transformation saving shortfall, the MTFP report to Cabinet in February 2026 provided a more detailed breakdown of the performance of phase one transformation reviews and timeline for savings. This shortfall was accounted for in the MTFP set in February's budget report.
- With regard to the reduction in agency spending in children's services, further details would be provided after the meeting along with targets for further savings. The Director of Children's Services had undertaken focused activity within children's services and a review was also now underway examining agency spend across all directorates
- The dividend from the Hampton by Hilton Hotel in year was in excess of the budget set for that year and further details would be provided after the meeting

AGREED that the report be noted.

ESC/21/26 Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Education

The Committee considered the Executive Summary of the People Select Committee's Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Education which was due to be presented to Cabinet in September.

Overall, the Committee recognised the importance of building on the strong foundations already in place for post-16 collaboration and improving outcomes. The Committee concluded that with sustained focus and collective commitment, there was significant opportunity to further enhance post-16 education in Stockton-on-Tees, improving participation, reducing NEET levels, and enabling more young people to achieve their potential while contributing to the Borough's future economic growth.

AGREED that the Executive Summary be noted.

ESC/22/26 Scrutiny Review of Additionally Resourced SEND Provision

The Committee considered the Executive Summary of the Children and Young People's Select Committee's Scrutiny Review of Additionally Resourced SEND Provision which was due to be presented to Cabinet in September.

Early in the scrutiny review, the Government announced that it would be publishing a White Paper outlining the intended approach to SEND reform. The announcement came amid increasing calls for action regarding the rising number of registered SEND pupils and the associated challenges faced by councils. Following the announcement, the Select Committee decided to pause the review to await the detail of the White Paper.

In May 2026 the Select Committee received a presentation on the White Paper and considered the implications for their work. The Select Committee agreed to summarise the evidence collected and key findings and advise Cabinet that they would be concluding their work given that the Government was now making plans to direct all schools to have Inclusion Hubs.

The evidence, findings and conclusions would therefore be presented to Cabinet for noting.

The Committee requested that the full report be circulated.

AGREED that the Executive Summary be noted.

ESC/23/26 Forward Plan

Members requested that in future all Members be notified when an item is added to the Forward Plan.

AGREED that the Forward Plan be noted.

ESC/24/26 Chairs' Updates

Members were provided with updates from the Chairs of each Select Committee.

AGREED that the Chairs' Updates be noted.

ESC/25/26 Chair's Update and Executive Scrutiny Work Programme

AGREED that the Work Programme be noted.

Chair: