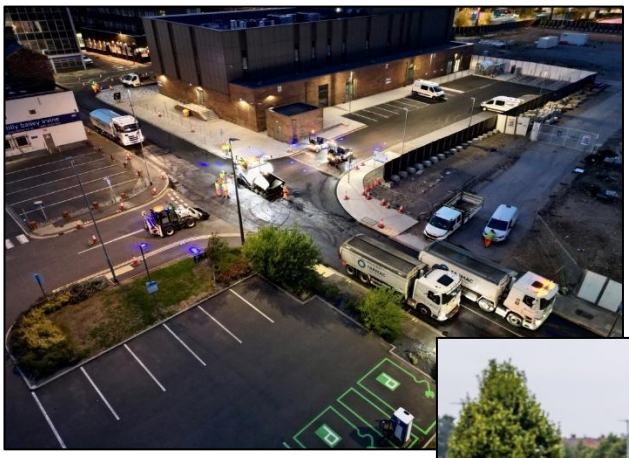

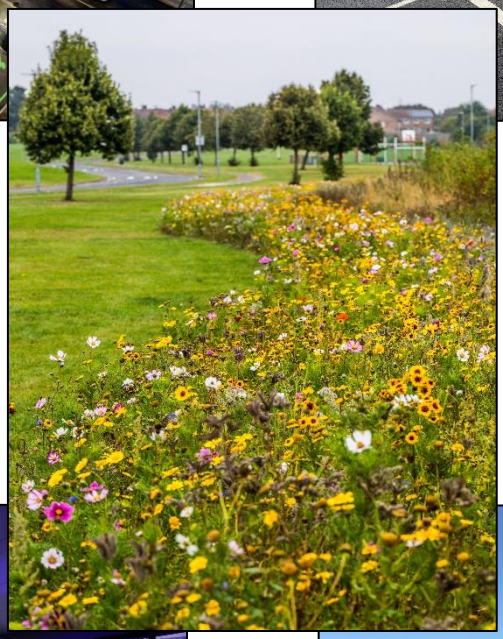

Scrutiny Review of Community Participation Budget and Ward Transport Budget

Community Safety Select Committee

DRAFT Final Report

October 2026

Stockton-on-Tees BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Acknowledgements

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- Phil Hardie (Highway Network & Traffic Team Leader) – Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC)
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- Natalie Sargeant (Customer Development Lead) – SBC
- Sarah Robinson (Community Engagement Team Manager) – SBC
- Jem Bagdatlioglu (Consultation Officer) – SBC
- SBC Ward Councillors who provided their views on this scrutiny topic via a Committee survey
- Town and Parish Councils who provided their views on this scrutiny topic via a Committee survey
- Local residents who provided their views on this scrutiny topic via a Committee survey

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Foreword

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Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy
Chair
Community Safety Select Committee

Cllr Katie Zagoria
Vice-Chair
Community Safety Select Committee

Original Brief

Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

The review will contribute to the following Stockton-on-Tees Plan 2024-2028 priorities:

- *Priority 2: Healthy & Resilient Communities*: We will support residents to be safe and connected to each other in their homes and communities.

- Priority *3: A Great Place to Live, Work and Visit*: We will make Stockton-on-Tees a great place to live, work and visit - a Borough that residents can be proud of. It will be a vibrant and diverse place with an environment that is well looked after and outdoor spaces to enjoy.

- *Priority 5: A Sustainable Council*: We will ensure our council is financially sustainable and manages our assets effectively to enhance their local impact. We will be a well-run council across areas of our business and continue to improve outcomes for communities.

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) provides Elected Members with two budget schemes that, through engagement with the local community, can be used to fund project ideas within their wards:

- The Community Participation Budget (CPB) can be used to fund a variety of developments ranging from small engineering schemes that improve the function of the space on or adjacent to the highway, to small projects that improve the local amenity space. The CPB is divided between wards on the basis of population-per-ward.

- The Ward Transport Budget (WTB) is an allocation of the Council's City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement budget that is allocated on a ward-by-ward basis to undertake potential projects identified to address transport-related issues raised by members of the public via their local Ward Councillors.

The projects that the CPB and WTB are typically used for are those that generate resident interest and engagement, albeit at a local level. Whilst these are generally small-scale and local in character, they connect directly with resident concerns and can have a significant impact on social and environmental wellbeing. Through the direct involvement of Ward Councillors and the input of the communities they represent, interventions should be well focused and likely to meet a genuine community concern.

Although there are a number of examples where both the CPB and WTB has been utilised to make positive differences across the Borough, several issues have arisen over the years in relation to these budget schemes. Ward Councillors can feel frustrated about what projects are deemed eligible / not eligible, the costs associated with a proposal, and the time taken from submission of a proposals to it being realised. In some cases, the completion of a project has created future revenue implications around maintaining / sustaining work developed via CPB or WTB funds. From an administrative perspective, there is also a need to mindful of the officer time spent on developing schemes which then are not progressed through to implementation.

The main aims for this review will be to:

- understand the scope of interventions that are eligible through these two budget schemes, the processes for determining the priorities for use of the funds, and the management of the projects that are funded through CPB and WTB.

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- establish the effectiveness of these two budgets and whether projects funded through the CPB and WTB have had genuine and sustained impact.
- ascertain the communication of the CPB and WTB to Ward Councillors and wider public awareness of these two funding streams.
- consider the value of CPB and WTB in the context of significant ongoing budget pressures for the Council as a whole.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

What are the underlying aims of the CPB and WTB, have these changed since they were introduced, and how are the two budget schemes different / interlinked?

How much does each Ward / Ward Councillor have access to, and has this changed over time (if so, why)? How much has been spent by Wards / Ward Councillors in recent years, and what available funds have not been used (and what happens to these)?

What is considered an eligible / ineligible proposal, and how is this determined? Have criteria changed over the years?

What is the process for submitting, considering and deciding upon proposals? Who is involved and what is the timeframe for determining the validity and progression of a project?

How effective have completed projects been and how are these assessed? Have they created future revenue pressures?

How aware are Ward Councillors about these schemes – how are they communicated, and how are they kept updated on any submitted proposals?

Are residents of the Borough made aware about these potential funding opportunities and how they can submit ideas / proposals?

Is there an appetite to maintain existing CPB / WTB arrangements?

Can the Council learn anything from similar schemes being used in other Local Authorities?

Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and / or transformation:

- Clarity about the criteria and eligibility of work and the avoidance of unfunded future revenue pressures arising from the one-off capital works.

- Confidence that the level of investment made through the CPB and WTB represents value for money and is justifiable in the context of overall budget pressures.

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1.0 Executive Summary

1.1. This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Community Safety Select Committee's scrutiny review of Community Participation Budget and Ward Transport Budget.

1.2. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) provides Elected Members (also known as Ward Councillors) with two budget schemes that, through engagement with the local community, can be used to fund project ideas within their wards:

- The Community Participation Budget (CPB) offers opportunities to fund a variety of developments ranging from small engineering schemes that improve the function of the space on or adjacent to the highway, to small projects that improve the local amenity space. The CPB is divided between wards on the basis of population-per-ward.

- The Ward Transport Budget (WTB) is a share of the Council's City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement budget that is allocated on a ward-by-ward basis to undertake potential projects identified to address transport-related issues raised by members of the public via their local Ward Councillors.

1.3. The projects that the CPB and WTB are typically used for are those that generate resident interest and engagement, albeit at a local level. Whilst these are generally small-scale and local in character, they connect directly with resident concerns and can have a significant impact on social and environmental wellbeing. Through the direct involvement of Ward Councillors and the input of the communities they represent, interventions should be well focused and likely to meet a genuine community concern.

1.4. Although there are a number of examples where both the CPB and WTB has been utilised to make positive differences across the Borough, several issues have arisen over the years in relation to these budget schemes. Ward Councillors can feel frustrated about what projects are deemed eligible / not eligible, the costs associated with a proposal, and the time taken from submission of a proposal to it being realised. In some cases, the completion of a project has created future revenue implications around maintaining / sustaining work developed via CPB or WTB funds. From an administrative perspective, there is also a need to be mindful of the officer time spent on shaping schemes which are then not progressed through to implementation.

1.5. The main aims for this review were to understand the scope of interventions that were eligible through these two budget schemes, the processes for determining the priorities for use of the funds, and the management of the projects that were funded through CPB and WTB. In addition, the Committee sought to establish the effectiveness of these two budgets and whether projects funded through the CPB and WTB had seen genuine and sustained impact. Ascertaining the communication of the CPB and WTB to Ward Councillors (as well as wider public awareness of these two funding streams) and exploring the value of CPB and WTB in the context of significant ongoing budget pressures for the Council were also important considerations.

1.6. The Committee found that both CPB (£200,000 per annum) and WTB (£150,000 per annum) allocations are divided between wards based on population. It is important to note that the CPB can match-fund WTB schemes where there may be a shortfall in available budget. Conversely, WTB funding cannot be used for CPB projects as the latter are more environmentally focused (rather than transport-related).

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1.7. The CPB and WTB can be directed towards local issues where the concerns of constituents do not meet the evidence thresholds for funding via core budgets. SBC offers further flexibility with regard carry-forward of unspent funding into the following year (subject to Cabinet Member approval), the ability to draw down from the following year's allocation early if a larger project exceeded a single year's funding, and the option of pooling budgets with neighbouring wards. However, a caveat also exists that unspent allocations may be re-absorbed or re-allocated (a decision that would ultimately be taken by the Cabinet Member, depending on the Council's financial position) – something which should prompt all Ward Councillors and their respective residents to ensure potential projects are identified and submitted.

1.8. As of mid-2026, the Committee was informed that both budget schemes had a significant underspend for the 2025-2026 and early-2026-2027 period (58% for the CPB and 73% for the WTB), though it was also acknowledged that much of this could be attributed to limitations on the capacity to develop and deliver projects, as well as a frequent need to follow statutory procedures, rather than a lack of demand. Indeed, subsequent evidence showed that numerous proposals (worth an estimated £340,000) had been submitted and were still being assessed or were now in programme.

1.9. Whilst there had been a clear effort to provide guidance on the types of projects that would be eligible under each scheme, comments from some Ward Councillors appeared to show an element of confusion and disillusionment around what these budgets should be used for. Concern was raised over allocations being spent on work that, in the view of Ward Councillors, should be covered by core funding rather than the CPB or WTB.

1.10. Two key issues were identified following the submission of project ideas; 1) the potential for proposals to create ongoing revenue or maintenance costs, and 2) required officer time spent on developing schemes, many of which are then not progressed through to implementation. Whilst these were important factors, the most pressing concern in relation to receiving and determining submissions centred on the significant limitations in officer resource (with only one dedicated staff member processing proposals from 27 wards and 56 Ward Councillors) – a critical pinch point which, alongside delays sometimes created by the need for statutory duties to be observed, appears to undermine the ability to make local improvements in a timely fashion.

1.11. SBC Ward Councillors (34) who responded to a Committee survey were almost unanimously aware of the eligibility criteria for both the CPB and WTB, though some expressed a desire for this to be simplified / widened so the wishes of residents and their representative/s could be satisfied. Other themes that emerged from the feedback received included CPB and WTB allocations having to be used for projects that, in their opinion, should be funded through central budgets, high / excessive quotes (work could / should be done for less), limited officer capacity to process submitted proposals (with delays sometimes leading to increased costs), and the time taken from submission of a proposal to it being realised (if approved). A lack of appropriate updates on progress of a proposal was a frequently aired concern (though 22 of the 34 survey respondents stated they did receive updates) – time will tell if the new online case management platform enables improved communication with Councillors – with only 38% (13) of Elected Members 'satisfied' with the delivery of approved works.

1.12. Although eliciting a limited response (6 of 16), the Committee's survey of local Town and Parish Councils revealed both a lack of awareness of these budget schemes from some, and examples where the CPB and / or the WTB had helped fund projects from others. There was a clear appetite for greater clarity and communication with Town and Parish Councils in relation to these funding pots, with numerous suggestions put forward on what they could contribute towards.

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1.13. A large majority of the 97 residents who responded to a further Committee survey (issued via the SBC Community Engagement Team) were unaware of the CPB (67) and WTB (81), with only eight having engaged with their respective SBC Ward Councillor regarding a CPB or WTB-related project / proposal. There were repeated calls for more information and transparency around these budget schemes (including from those who belonged to resident / community groups), along with a vast range of views on what the allocated funding might be used for. The Committee recognises the number of responses reflects a very small proportion of the Borough's population, but feedback nevertheless provides an indication of a lack of public awareness which the Council and its Ward Councillors have a responsibility to grow.

1.14. Research on similar Member-led budget models used by other Local Authorities demonstrated differences in available funding, governance / control measures, and project eligibility, though also highlighted the same experiences in terms of the creation of revenue / maintenance pressures, expectations versus deliverability, and officer capacity. One key difference between SBC and other Local Authorities was the transparency of such schemes to the public, with several examples provided where local residents were able to see individual Ward Councillor spend (City of Stoke-on-Trent), a breakdown of projects funded along with photographic evidence (Hillingdon), and interactive maps of projects completed through their current scheme (Royal Borough of Greenwich).

1.15. The CPB and WTB are laudable funding schemes that have delivered tangible benefits across Stockton-on-Tees, but evidence also suggests they are not working as efficiently as they could / should. It is clear that Ward Councillors greatly value these budgets (with 31 of the 34 survey respondents wanting both schemes to continue in their current form or with minor changes), but there appears to be a fundamental flaw around the level of resource (only one dedicated officer) to support the determination of, and communication around, project proposals, as well as issues in relation to eligibility criteria and quoted costs which need to be considered. Furthermore, given the essence of these budgets is to address resident concerns, it is incumbent upon both SBC and its Ward Councillors to ensure local people are regularly made aware of the opportunities these schemes offer (though if frustrations already exist around the time taken from submission of a proposal to it being realised, this will only increase the pressure on assessing, determining and implementing projects). These budget schemes continue to be a democratic means of addressing local issues, and greater efficiency in proceeding from proposal to decision (and then, if approved, to delivery) will strengthen their credibility in the eyes of both Ward Councillors and the residents they serve.

Recommendations

The Committee recommend that:

1) **Both the Community Participation Budget (CPB) and the Ward Transport Budget (WTB) should remain as separate Member-led schemes.**

2) **With due regard to the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Ward Councillor survey feedback, SBC reviews and refreshes the guidance available to SBC Ward Councillors on CPB and WTB eligibility criteria and scheme delivery processes (which should include approximate timelines involved in the most common project proposals).**

3) **SBC considers creating additional resource to support the processing of CPB / WTB proposals (and subsequent communication on these to SBC Ward Councillors).**

(continued overleaf…)

Recommendations (continued)

The Committee recommend that:

4) SBC continues to develop, and then implements, its new CPB / WTB-related digital case management and submission system (to include a Members Briefing at the appropriate time).

5) SBC strengthens processes around communication between relevant SBC Ward Councillors and officers designing a CPB / WTB scheme if, after feasibility checks are undertaken, environmental or other factors mean the original scope cannot be achieved.

6) Annual updates be provided to all SBC Ward Councillors on the state of CPB / WTB proposals (including the in-year and full four-year Council term budget position).

7) SBC Ward Councillors be supported to increase engagement with local resident and community groups to generate and discuss project proposals at ward level via Ward surgeries and Members newsletters.

8) To increase wider understanding and promotion of these budget schemes, SBC:

a) publishes a short annual summary on its website of projects funded through CPB and WTB in each ward.

b) uses its website to confirm budget allocations, processes for applications, any deadlines for season-specific works, and principal contacts for enquiries.

c) periodically advertises its CPB / WTB website link to the Borough's Town and Parish Councils, and local residents, via all available communication mediums.

9) SBC introduces an annual report to the relevant SBC scrutiny committee on the CPB and WTB (allocations, proposals, spend, carry-forward, etc.).

2.0 Introduction

2.1. This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Community Safety Select Committee's scrutiny review of Community Participation Budget (CPB) and Ward Transport Budget (WTB).

2.2. The main aims for this review were to understand the scope of interventions that were eligible through these two budget schemes, the processes for determining the priorities for use of the funds, and the management of the projects that were funded through CPB and WTB. In addition, the Committee sought to establish the effectiveness of these two budgets and whether projects funded through the CPB and WTB had seen genuine and sustained impact. Ascertaining the communication of the CPB and WTB to Ward Councillors (as well as wider public awareness of these two funding streams) and exploring the value of CPB and WTB in the context of significant ongoing budget pressures for the Council were also important considerations.

2.3. The Committee identified the following key lines of enquiry:

- What are the underlying aims of the CPB and WTB, have these changed since they were introduced, and how are the two budget schemes different / interlinked?
- How much does each Ward / Ward Councillor have access to, and has this changed over time (if so, why)? How much has been spent by Wards / Ward Councillors in recent years, and what available funds have not been used (and what happens to these)?
- What is considered an eligible / ineligible proposal, and how is this determined? Have criteria changed over the years?
- What is the process for submitting, considering and deciding upon proposals? Who is involved and what is the timeframe for determining the validity and progression of a project?
- How effective have completed projects been and how are these assessed? Have they created future revenue pressures?
- How aware are Ward Councillors about these schemes – how are they communicated, and how are they kept updated on any submitted proposals?
- Are residents of the Borough made aware about these potential funding opportunities and how they can submit ideas / proposals?
- Is there an appetite to maintain existing CPB / WTB arrangements?
- Can the Council learn anything from similar schemes being used in other Local Authorities?

2.4. The Committee took evidence from the SBC Neighbourhoods (formerly SBC Community Services, Environment and Culture) and SBC Corporate Services directorates, and surveys were issued to SBC Ward Councillors, the Borough's Town and Parish Councils, and local residents (circulated to existing engagement mechanisms via the SBC Community Engagement Team). Similar Member-led budget schemes offered by other Local Authorities were also considered.

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3.0 Background

3.1 Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) provides Elected Members (also known as Ward Councillors) with two budget schemes that, through engagement with the local community, can be used to fund project ideas within their wards:

- The Community Participation Budget (CPB) offers opportunities to fund a variety of developments ranging from small engineering schemes that improve the function of the space on or adjacent to the highway, to small projects that improve the local amenity space. The CPB is divided between wards on the basis of population-per-ward.

- The Ward Transport Budget (WTB) is a share of the Council's City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement budget that is allocated on a ward-by-ward basis to undertake potential projects identified to address transport-related issues raised by members of the public via their local Ward Councillors.

3.2 The projects that the CPB and WTB are typically used for are those that generate resident interest and engagement, albeit at a local level. Whilst these are generally small-scale and local in character, they connect directly with resident concerns and can have a significant impact on social and environmental wellbeing. Through the direct involvement of Ward Councillors and the input of the communities they represent, interventions should be well focused and likely to meet a genuine community concern.

3.3 Although there are a number of examples where both the CPB and WTB has been utilised to make positive differences across the Borough, several issues have arisen over the years in relation to these budget schemes. Ward Councillors can feel frustrated about what projects are deemed eligible / not eligible, the costs associated with a proposal, and the time taken from submission of a proposal to it being realised. In some cases, the completion of a project has created future revenue implications around maintaining / sustaining work developed via CPB or WTB funds. From an administrative perspective, there is also a need to be mindful of the officer time spent on shaping schemes which are then not progressed through to implementation.

3.4 Historically, the Council's scrutiny function has played a role in the development of these two budget schemes:

CPB: In December 2017, as part of an officer-led 'reporting-in' review, the SBC People Select Committee considered an update report which outlined the financial situation with regard the CPB, detailed uncommitted ward allocations at that time, and included the Council's CPB guidance document.

The Committee's request for changes to the list of eligible projects (to broaden the scope of the CPB) and its proposal for budget allocations to be set per Member (as opposed per ward) were noted within a Cabinet report that was subsequently presented in May 2018. Cabinet resolved to endorse continued use of the CPB guidance, with the expenditure of any uncommitted ward allocations of the CPB to be considered at the discretion of the Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport. The process of officers providing recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport of potential changes to the list of eligible projects, and how the budget was allocated across the wards, was also supported.

Community Participation Budget

People Select Committee – 18th December 2017

Summary

This report outlines the current financial situation with regards the Community Participation Budget (CPB) and highlights details of uncommitted Ward allocations.

Recommendations

1. Endorse the expenditure of uncommitted Ward allocations of the Community Participation Budget at the discretion of the Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport, as outlined in the Community Participation Budget Guidance.

2. Officers to provide recommendations to the Cabinet Member of eligible projects requested by local residents.

Background

1. Prior to the Community Participation Budget being in existence some funding for local projects was allocated to a Borough wide fund called the Minor Highway Improvement Budget, which was prioritised by officers.

2. In 2006/07, following comments from Ward Councillors that this budget was not evenly distributed across the Borough, the Members Advisory Panel approved changes to this budget.

3. The Community Participation Budget (CPB) started in 2007/08 under the name the Small Environmental Improvements Budget with a funding allocation of £400,000 per year. The name of this budget was then changed to reflect the importance of community participation in the development of project ideas for the wards.

4. The budget is divided across the Borough on a ward-by-ward basis based on the ward populations.

5. The CPB can be used to fund a variety of projects ranging from small engineering schemes that improve the function of the space on or adjacent to the highway or small projects that improve the local amenity space. Details of eligible and ineligible projects can be found within the CPB Guidance (see Appendix 1).

6. While any unspent funding from previous years can be carried forward and added to the following year's allocation this should be kept to a minimum. Justification for carrying forward funding should be reserved for committed projects which cannot be delivered before the financial year end due to work programme capacity issues or other delivery constraints. However, the majority of funding that has been carried forward previously each year has been uncommitted to a specific project.

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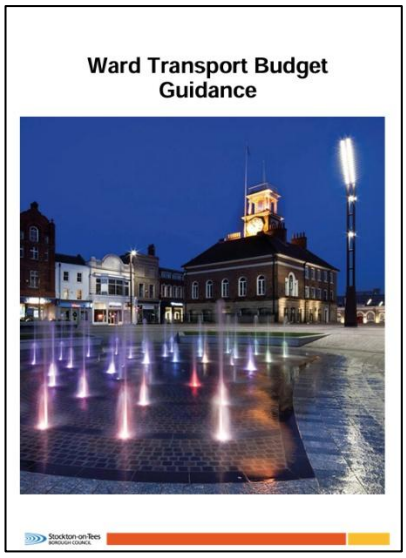
WTB: In 2019, the SBC Place Select Committee undertook an Area Transport Strategy (ATS) review, the final report of which was presented to, and subsequently endorsed by, Cabinet in January 2020. A key recommendation was for the existing ATS scheme to cease at the end of the then financial year (31 March 2020), with the yearly ATS funding allocation to be transferred to the CPB on a ward-by-ward basis determined by population-per-ward (this addition to CPB funding should be ring-fenced for transport-related spend only). The Committee also recommended that the new ring-fenced transport-related element of the CPB should not be tied to the future of the overall CPB initiative (i.e. it is not dependent upon the existence of CPB).



As a result of the Committee's ATS review, from 2020-2021, an annual budget of £200,000 was allocated from the Local Transport Plan (LTP) to a new scheme called the Ward Transport Budget (WTB). Supporting this refreshed approach, a WTB Guidance document was circulated to SBC Ward Councillors which set out the flexibility of the budget (with the provision to combine more than one year's budget, allow matching funding from the CPB, and also from neighbouring ward allocations) and highlighted that any project with a Borough-wide / strategic impact / benefit would be considered as part of the wider LTP.

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4.0 Findings

Origins / aims / characteristics of the two budget schemes

4.1. The origins and evolution of the Community Participation Budget (CPB) and Ward Transport Budget (WTB) were summarised as follows:

- CPB: Introduced in 2007 as the Small Environmental Improvements Budget (providing a modest, flexible funding mechanism for local environmental works that were not prioritised through core budgets), the scheme was later re-named to reflect community participation and Member input (with Ward Councillors promoting projects based on local priorities). This annual Borough-wide pot was initially £400,000 per year (revenue-funded) and was allocated by population. Over time, the eligibility expanded to small engineering works, and in 2019, through the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), the scheme was reduced to £200,000 per year, with tighter eligibility introduced to reflect long-term maintenance impacts.

- WTB: This scheme began following a Place Select Committee review of the Area Transport Strategy in 2019 which saw the budget move from an area-based pot that Members would bid into to obtain funds to ward-based allocations which made it easier for Members to access. From April 2020, £200,000 per year was allocated (reduced to £150,000 from 2024-2025), with funding ring-fenced for transport issues. WTB operated within a structured, evidence-led framework – Members shaped priorities, while officers assessed, designed and delivered schemes to ensure they met safety, legal and affordability requirements.

4.2. Despite both budget schemes being Member-led, there were some key differences between them:

- CPB was revenue funding, which had been identified within the MTFP and supported broader community-focused capital works.

- WTB, meanwhile, was capital funding from the Council's annual allocation toward highway priorities from the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement, and was strictly transport-focused (spending was audited to ensure it was directed toward transport priorities).

CPB could match-fund WTB schemes where there may be a shortfall in available budget. However, WTB funding could not be used for CPB projects as the latter were more environmentally focused (rather than transport-related). Crucially, it was important to emphasise that both budgets remained Council funds, where Members influenced priorities and officers retained overall responsibility for determining validity and for delivery.

4.3. The Council's core highway budgets prioritised statutory duties and road safety interventions at locations with proven casualty records (based on recorded evidence from the Cleveland Police road casualty database). The Department for Transport (DfT) assessed how Council's spent money, and if this was judged to have been used unwisely, funding could be withheld. CPB and WTB budgets operated differently because they allowed flexibility and could be directed where the concerns of constituents did not meet the evidence thresholds for funding via core budgets. The availability of the CPB / WTB therefore filled the gap between evidence thresholds and lived experience of the Borough's residents.

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4.4. In summary, these budgets allowed Members to make local improvements that complemented SBCs core budget and made a real difference to residents (providing flexibility for smaller-scale issues that were not prioritised elsewhere). However, there were challenges to address around delivery capacity alongside the Council's statutory duties (leading to pressures on timescales), the potential for sustainability and revenue implications, and the future communication and visibility of these schemes (particularly to / for residents).

Budget allocations and spend

4.5. Both CPB and WTB allocations were divided between wards based on population. Whilst unspent funding could be carried forward into the following year, it was encouraged to be kept to a minimum as there was the possibility it could be re-absorbed or re-allocated (that decision would ultimately be taken by the Cabinet Member, depending on the Council's financial position). For larger projects that exceeded a single year's funding, there was the option to draw down from the following year so as not to delay delivery of good projects (with the caveat that this could not be done during election years where future budgets and memberships were undetermined).

Ward	WTB	CPB
Billingham Central	£5,706	£7,607
Billingham East	£5,335	£7,113
Billingham North	£5,486	£7,314
Billingham South	£5,969	£7,959
Billingham West & Wolviston	£4,993	£6,658
Bishopsgarth & Elm Tree	£5,167	£6,890
Eaglescliffe East	£4,866	£6,487
Eaglescliffe West	£5,120	£6,827
Fairfield	£7,375	£9,833
Grangefield	£2,605	£3,473
Hardwick & Salters Lane	£5,564	£7,419
Hartburn	£7,285	£9,713
Ingleby Barwick North	£8,853	£11,805

Ward	WTB	CPB
Ingleby Barwick South	£8,722	£11,629
Mandale & Victoria	£5,811	£7,748
Newtown	£2,594	£3,459
Northern Parishes	£5,314	£7,085
Norton Central	£4,924	£6,566
Norton North	£5,357	£7,142
Norton South	£4,860	£6,480
Ropner	£5,287	£7,049
Roseworth	£5,959	£7,945
Southern Villages	£1,910	£2,547
Stainsby Hill	£5,852	£7,803
Stockton Town Centre	£5,082	£6,777
Village	£5,731	£7,641
Yarm	£8,273	£11,031

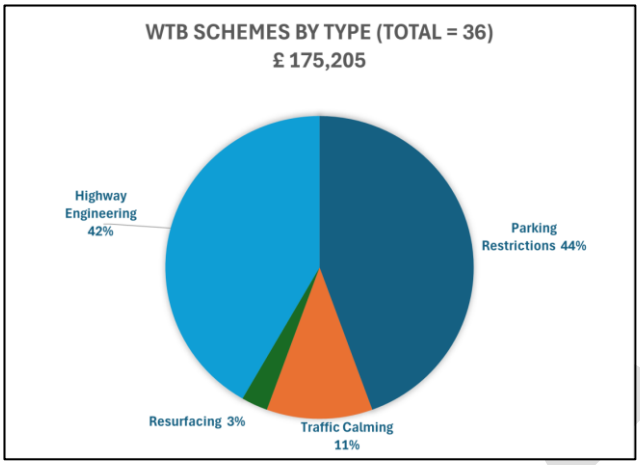
4.6. As per the tables above, the individual allocations for each of the Borough's 27 wards were outlined (it was reiterated that there was only one dedicated SBC officer to manage all the enquiries, investigations and deliveries), with graphics showing that both schemes had an underspend (58% unspent for the CPB and 73% unspent for the WTB). This situation may reflect capacity to develop and deliver rather than a lack of demand, and could be alleviated by addressing resident concerns about the condition of the Borough's highways (reflected in the annual National Highways & Transport Survey – see graphic below), something which had been undertaken in some wards via the WTB.

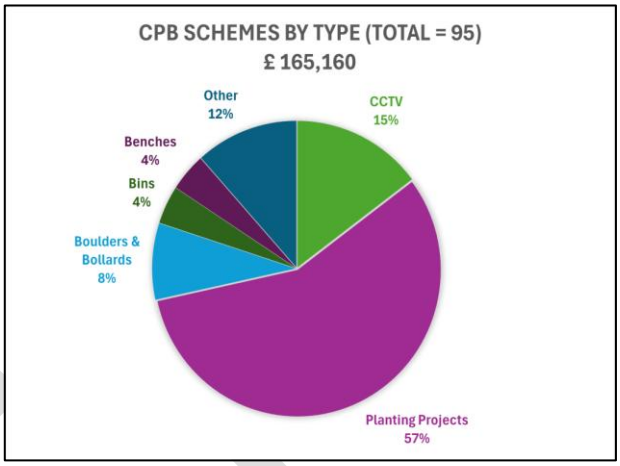
Highway Maintenance

Reference	Indicator	Stockton	Quartile	NHT Highest	NHT Average	NHT Lowest	Difference %
KBI23	Condition of highways	29%	2	52%	27%	11%	2%
KBI24	Highway maintenance	46%	1	56%	43%	35%	3%
KBI25	Street lighting	65%	1	70%	60%	49%	5%
KBI26	Highway enforcement/obstructions	45%	1	54%	40%	32%	5%
HMBI01	Condition of road surfaces	26%	3	52%	26%	10%	0%
HMBI02	Cleanliness of roads	46%	2	57%	45%	35%	1%
HMBI03	Condition of road markings	44%	2	61%	43%	33%	1%
HMBI05	Provision of street Lighting	58%	2	65%	57%	44%	1%

National Highways & Transport (NHT) Survey 2025: Public Satisfaction (546 responses (16.6%))

4.7. As of May 2026, CPB schemes costing just over £165,000 and WTB schemes totalling just over £175,000 were in development and committed (see below graphics), whilst the cost of those projects that were not progressed came to nearly £432,000. It was emphasised that any underspend in relation to either budget reflected schemes that were either in development or constrained by delivery factors, not by a lack of demand / interest.





Project eligibility

4.8. With regard the types of projects which each budget scheme could fund:

- CPB: Schemes should focus on local community and environmental improvements, must demonstrate local need and community benefit, and must be feasible and deliverable.

  The CPB could be used to capital fund projects, but SBC needed to be mindful of proposals that created ongoing revenue or maintenance costs. Eligibility was therefore refined to avoid unfunded liabilities, and some schemes would only become eligible where third-parties (e.g. Town / Parish Councils or resident groups) took on maintenance.

- WTB: This was far stricter and operated within a tightly defined framework, where funding could only be used for transport, safety and accessibility interventions. All schemes required evidence-based assessment (e.g. safety data / speed surveys) to demonstrate eligibility, with projects triggering ongoing revenue costs or amenity scope being excluded.

4.9. The Committee asked if Members were able to use allocated funds for repairing potholes (an issue which was frequently raised by residents). It was stated that neither the CPB nor WTB was generally used for potholes and that approval of such work would have to meet the necessary intervention levels. In terms of road re-surfacing, officers noted that there was more highway needing attention than the Council had a budget for.

4.10. Proposed new schemes had the potential to create ongoing revenue costs which may in turn influence eligibility. Examples of such projects (and associated revenue implications) included the installation of CCTV (requiring monitoring costs), planting (needing maintenance / watering), bins (to be emptied / serviced), road markings (necessitating periodic refresh and enforcement), and speed indicator devices (creating energy costs, with mobile devices needing to be rotated to different locations).

Application / determination / implementation

4.11. **Processes / Timescales:**

- CPB: These schemes started with Members submitting project requests, supported by evidence of community need – officers then assessed feasibility, eligibility, costs and risks, and whether consultation was required. Seasonal deadlines applied to some CPB activity (e.g. planting) to allow delivery to be completed within the financial year – late submissions may be deferred to the next year (contributing to perceptions of delay).

- WTB: This was far more structured, with proposals initially submitted via the online Member portal which then triggered officer investigation (site visits, surveys, historic data review) – only once these were done could the detailed design begin. Often these works required a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO), therefore it was not unreasonable for such schemes to take up to nine months before they started to hit work programmes. It was also important to highlight that delivery was reliant on workload and capacity – for both the WTB and CPB, the Council had only one dedicated officer dealing with 27 wards and 56 Members, and there was an additional need to factor in required input from other SBC departments (e.g. Design Services, Legal Services) which may result in extended timescales.

4.12. To emphasise the timelines involved in some CPB / WTB-related projects, examples were given on the steps required (along with the approximate timescales for each) for introducing double yellow lines and traffic calming measures (both involving a stringent legal process), as well as litter bins.

Step or milestone	Approximate timescale
Request received. Logged for audit and tracking; initial feasibility checks commenced	4 weeks
Initial site assessment, including review of collision history and existing speed survey data	
Advise Ward Councillors of survey requirements and costs (7-day speed survey if required)	6 weeks
Arrange and undertake a 7-day speed survey and provide results to Councillors	
Feasibility decision and options discussion with Councillors, including site visit if required	4 weeks
Design of preferred option; prepare drawings and outline costs	8 weeks
Internal cost check with Highway Operations and final proposal issued to Councillors	4 weeks
Councillor decision to proceed using the Ward budget allocation	1 week
Consultation with Ward Councillors and quarterly OTG / Police	6 weeks
Any informal consultation with directly affected businesses/residents	
Update Councillors. Finalise report & seek Cabinet Member approval	4 weeks
Instructions to Legal to draft TRO, agree drafts, and arrange advertising	4 weeks
Statutory advertising (notices on-site, press, online) cannot be reduced	21 days
If there are no objections, publish the 2nd advert in the press	1 week
If there are no objections, the scheme will be approved and added to the Works Programme	12 weeks

Flowchart: Traffic Calming

4.13. Reflecting on the workforce resources that the Council had to support these schemes, the Committee commented that whilst funding may be available to support viable projects, there was clearly a capacity issue in terms of getting proposals implemented / delivered. In response, officers suggested that, in order to ensure the Council was prioritising the most impactful repairs to the Borough's highway, details on what roads were listed on the maintenance programme could be shared with Members to see if these locations mirrored what residents were raising concerns about.

4.14. **Current situation:**

- CPB: 95 schemes were currently being worked through (the vast majority of which were now in the programme for delivery, with a very small number either still being investigated / consulted upon or requiring further information), totalling just over £165,000. 57% concerned planting projects, 15% for CCTV, 8% in relation to boulders and bollards, 4% for bins, and 4% for benches. The remaining 12% was marked 'other' for projects involving different themes / categories.

- WTB: A total of 36 schemes were in progress (nearly half of which were now in the programme for delivery, with the remainder being almost evenly split between the 'investigate / consult', 'further information required', or 'awaiting programming' stages), totalling just over £175,000. 44% of these were in relation to parking restrictions, 42% for highway engineering, 11% for traffic calming, and 3% for resurfacing.

4.15. **Scheme delivery:** Using internal SBC teams to deliver CPB and WTB schemes avoided contractor overheads and allowed for a consistent approach to standards across the Borough's highway network. Benefits were also highlighted in relation to long-term assurance (in-house teams could be re-directed quickly to undertake priority / emergency works), the ability to efficiently deliver smaller schemes which were aligned with wider maintenance activity, and supporting jobs / retaining skilled staff (the latter being particularly important as these same professionals were relied upon to carry out the Council's statutory duties in maintaining the Borough's highways, deliver winter services by gritting through the cold winter nights, and responding to emergency incidents like flooding).

4.16. **Proposals not taken forward:** There had been 48 proposals not taken forward in the last 14 months (covering the full 2024-2025 financial year and the 2025-2026 financial year to date). 21 were not progressed for reasons such as cost eligibility or a lack of evidence (e.g. a demonstrable safety issue), 17 had technical constraints (e.g. the proposal conflicted with another planned scheme), and 10 did not proceed due to other priorities (e.g. re-direction of funds to alternative schemes). It was important to note that significant officer time / resource was required on an application even if a decision was subsequently made not to proceed.

Examples and effectiveness of approved schemes

4.17. Several projects facilitated through the CPB and WTB schemes over the past year were highlighted, including physical traffic calming measures, village gateway features to encourage reduced speeds, and parking restrictions.

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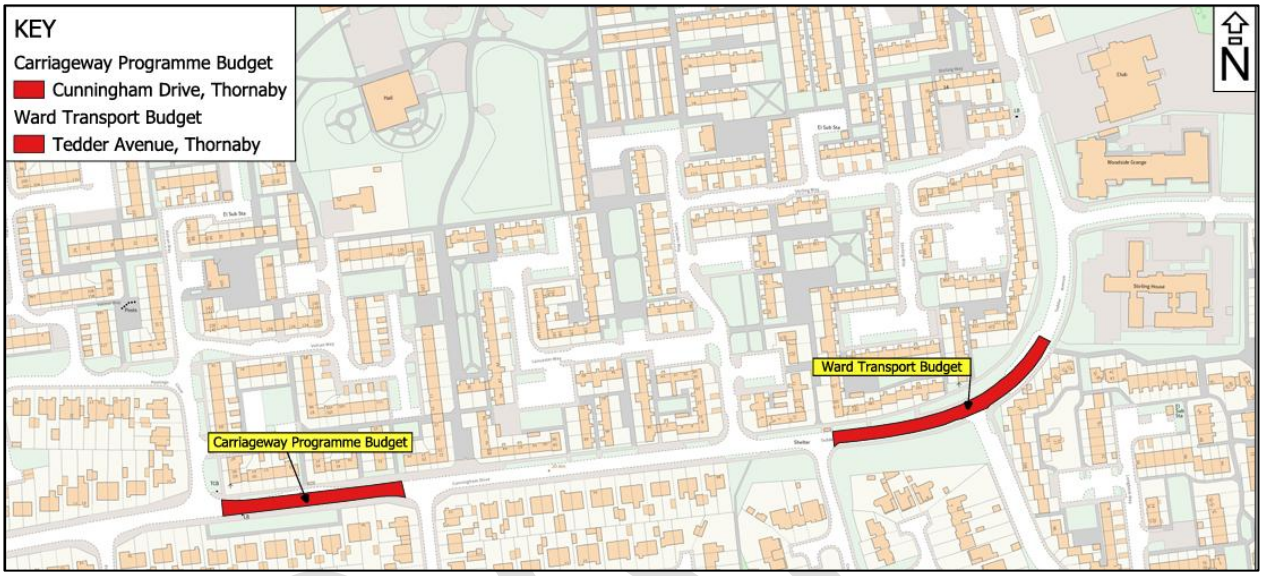
4.18. Examples were also given of carriageway and footway resurfacing where Members chose to use their budgets to bring forward schemes that were already identified as future contenders within SBCs five-year programme (this would allow delivery to be accelerated into the current financial year rather than waiting for their scheduled year). This included a live case in Thornaby (see graphic below), where resurfacing on Cunningham Drive was already programmed for the 2026-2027 year – Members had requested that their budget be used to bring forward resurfacing further along the same route on Tedder Avenue, enabling a larger area of works to be completed while resources were already on site (making a bigger difference to the condition of the highway and a noticeable improvement for residents).



4.19. **Effectiveness:** For traffic-calming schemes, speed surveys were conducted before and after implementation – this provided an objective, evidence-based measure of impact on vehicle speeds. Results from schemes delivered this year on Wynyard Road and Wolviston Road showed significant speed reductions – this enabled SBCs enforcement resources to be targeted elsewhere and also had a positive impact on partners (particularly the police).

4.20. For parking restrictions, SBC could look at the locations Members had requested double yellow lines for to overcome parking problems. Supporting this scrutiny review, a sample of completed CPB / WTB schemes were assessed after 12 months which focused on service requests, parking and anti-social behaviour (ASB), and repeat incidents – this showed that no service requests had been received into the SBC Civic Enforcement Team at most locations, with only low-level interventions where they did arise. Such a positive impact allowed Civic Enforcement Officers to turn their focus to issues like ASB and other frontline priorities.

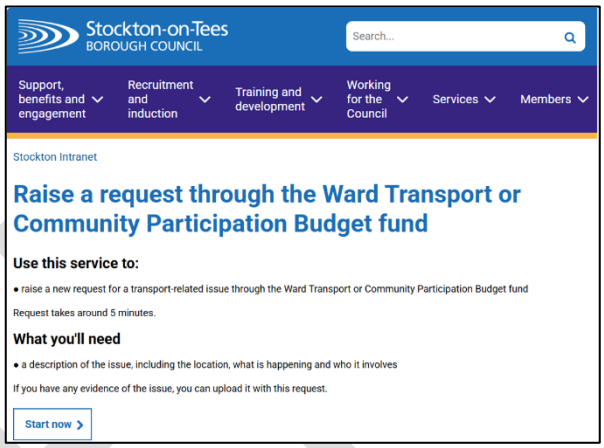
Communication of schemes

4.21. **Elected Members:** With regard Members, following an internal 'lean' review, an online platform was being developed to raise requests through the CPB and WTB – this case management solution would show the progress of current schemes and available budgets, with improved record-keeping and communication.

4.22. Improved guidance documents in relation to these schemes would be produced and circulated to Members highlighting issues raised within this review, including the level of detailed investigation, revised costs to reflect inflation, and available resource. A presentation on the new online case management platform was provided in July 2026 which covered the following:

- Online form introduction: A new online form had been designed to provide a consistent way of submitting new WTB requests. The form gathered the details needed to help assess proposals more effectively, reducing the need for follow-up emails seeking further information. Requests were securely recorded and managed by SBC officers through a single end-to-end process, improving the management and tracking of proposed schemes from submission through to outcome.

- Where to access the online form: The form would be easily accessible in the Members area of the SBC intranet.



- Online form – introduction page: The introduction page explained the purpose of the form and what information would be needed before submission. The page used the same look and feel as other Council online forms, thereby providing a familiar experience.

- Reporting new issues: The form enabled the submission of new issues for investigation. To avoid duplication, Members only needed to state each issue once.

- Issues within your ward: The online form was intended for reporting issues within a Member's ward boundary. Issues outside a ward could easily be raised by the relevant Member.

- Ward Member agreement: Where a ward had multiple Members, requests should be agreed by all Members before submission to prevent any potential delays.

- Providing issue information: Providing detailed information helped the request to be assessed more efficiently. Members could include features like 'what is happening', 'how often', 'who is affected' and 'where it is located'?

- Resolving the issue: Members should share any ideas or suggestions they might have for resolving the issue. Suggestions were optional and would be considered as part of the assessment process.

- Uploading evidence: Members could easily upload files they think were relevant, such as photos of the affected site or location. Photos, documents or correspondence could help provide additional context.

- Final check before submitting: An easy-to-follow 'Check your answers' page allowed Members to review their answers before submission. Members could return to any section to update information if needed.

- Confirmation: Members would receive instant confirmation that their request had been successfully submitted. A unique reference number was provided to help track the request, and a confirmation email was automatically sent for a Member's records.

- What happens next?: Requests were securely transferred into the Council's case management system. All details and supporting evidence were stored together in one place – this helped officers assess, track and manage requests efficiently.

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4.23. Regarding the presentation content, the Committee felt that further thought was needed around the requirement for all Members within a split ward to be in agreement on a submission, noting that some wards were represented by Councillors from different political parties who may not be willing / feel able to share proposals. SBC officers responded by stating that each ward had a single budget and that this requirement was simply asking if all Members within that ward were aware of the proposals. Assurance was also given that the second phase of this new digital development would allow Members to view progress of requests and check available budget balances.

4.24. Reflecting on the existing CPB / WTB submission process, the Committee asked whether the new digital platform would mean Members relying on the online system for updates rather than the current arrangement which involved communication with the sole SBC officer who was responsible for processing proposals. It was confirmed that digital developments would not replace the option for contact with officers, but that the system (which enabled information to be shared and received at any time of the day) should be the primary means of communicating.

4.25. In response to a subsequent query on whether the new platform would increase the workload of the responsible officer (who, it was felt, already had too much to deal with) and cause an added layer of bureaucracy, Members were informed that the online submission / tracking of proposals aimed to strengthen the efficiency and timeliness of decision-making and the implementation of projects, as well as the communication of these potential / successful schemes. It was also stated that an additional SBC staff member was now supporting the main officer in relation to CPB and WTB applications, and that, moving forward, a shared inbox for correspondence was being introduced to provide resilience in picking-up queries.

4.26. Committee comments concluded with Members welcoming sight of their budgets (including what had been spent / what was left) as part of this new development and acknowledging the benefits of this new system.

4.27. **Public**: In terms of communicating the schemes to the public, Members played a role in promoting these via ward surgeries / Councillor newsletters, and SBC had historically included articles in Stockton News to highlight the availability of the budgets and the projects it had delivered. It remained important to emphasise that schemes delivered through the CPB and WTB had often generated visible, localised benefits, and strengthened links between Members and their communities.

Views of SBC Ward Councillors

4.28. On 8 May 2026, the Committee issued a survey to all SBC Ward Councillors (56) on this scrutiny topic. A total of 34 responses were received before the survey closed on 12 June 2026 – feedback and selected quotes are outlined as follows:

1) Understanding & Clarity

*Are you aware of the eligibility criteria for the **Community Participation Budget (CPB)**?*

Yes:	**33**	No:	**1**

*Are you aware of the eligibility criteria for the **Ward Transport Budget (WTB)**?*

Yes:	**34**	No:	**0**

Do you have any other comments on the eligibility criteria for either budget?

'Items that are eligible but potentially could and should be funded by other means and not CPB / WTB; for example, dropped kerbs, road line markings, bigger schemes where WTB will not cover.'

'I am not aware of any criteria for CPB, even though this has been requested on numerous occasions from officers overseeing projects. Executive officers have been requested to identify the criteria; they have been unable to. Officers overseeing the various projects submitted across the Borough have been inconsistent in their advice causing frustration.'

'I've used the budgets since their inception in 2008; they fund practical and visible improvements that matter to residents that would never get prioritised through normal channels. They strengthen communities and make residents feel that they matter. It's often useful to be able to pool budgets with neighbouring wards working together to fund a larger project. Internal Council charges are high. As an example, annual maintenance of planters or bulbs can reduce budgets by a significant amount.'

'I believe that the criteria can be extremely strict and restrictive. Where we could get services cheaper in our wards, we are not always able to use our budgets which is wrong. Not only do our budgets allow us to invest in areas / repair areas, we should also be given the ability to get the most out of our budgets.'

'It's not my / our knowledge of the eligibility; it's officers who feel they have the right to override Councillors and wishes of residents which is the issue for me.'

'No - the criteria is clear and helpful.'

'Residents elect Ward Councillors to represent local priorities. Removing control of the above budgets weakens the democratic mandate and disengages local residents from their elected Councillors. Councillors are the ones that speak with their residents daily and know where residents want this money spending.'

'The eligibility criteria needs to be widened. A single pooled budget would be better with more discretion given to Councillors as to how it is spent.'

'Although I have said 'yes' to both questions, I think sometimes it can be a little unclear as to what is expected from Ward Councillors and what should be part of the Council budget.'

'Scope and eligibility of projects could be even extended.'

'No, very self-explanatory.'

'The eligibility criteria are generally appropriate, but could benefit from clearer guidance and practical examples to reduce ambiguity, particularly where projects overlap. A degree of flexibility would also help support innovative or cross-cutting initiatives. Simplifying the criteria could improve consistency and speed of delivery.'

'Budgets need to be kept to help Councillors make changes in their ward on things that Council won't carry out. Better internal charges need to be looked out as they are excessive (e.g. £1k for bin).'

'…CPB and WTB ensure decisions are made by Councillors who actually live in, represent and understand their communities, rather than being dictated centrally by officers or Cabinet Members removed from day-to-day ward issues. These budgets are one of the last remaining examples of genuine localism within Stockton-on-Tees and should be strengthened, not undermined… The real issue is not the existence of CPB and WTB, but the excessive internal charging structures imposed by the Council itself. Councillors are routinely quoted over £2,000 for wildflower planting, nearly £4,000 for CCTV provision and around £1,000 for a single bin, drastically reducing what can actually be delivered for residents…'

2) *Submitting Proposals*

Do you find it easy to submit a CPB / WTB proposal?

Yes:	**28**	No:	**6**

Do you have any other comments on submitting of proposals?

'The staff handling the proposals put forward do not have the capacity to handle the volume of cases which causes inevitable delays.'

'I appreciate [the supporting officer] has a huge workload and pressure instilled upon him to serve all Councillors. It may be easy to submit but difficult to keep on top of, with delays then increasing costs which is unfair. There is also too often that solutions that should be resolved by the Council are instead pushed to 'CPB / WTB' to resolve (e.g. dropped kerbs)…'

'Although I have no problem in the initial submission process, I find progress is then very slow and difficult due to the workload of the officer dealing and progressing the submission.'

'Quicker acknowledgment on submission.'

'No - they are well handled by [the supporting officer].'

'It's not the submitting of proposals that is the issue, it's the inordinate amount of time it takes to get things done. This I assume is due to lack of staffing. However, whatever the reason, I believe the lack of resources brings the Council into disrepute.'

'The amount of time taken to check and confirm if proposals can go ahead is too long. Only one dedicated officer to cover all wards is insufficient, especially during periods of absence or holidays. It can often take over 12 months from submitting a proposal to it getting the go ahead.'

'The actual process of submitting them is fine, but getting updates isn't. We often have to go seek them out.'

'The process is generally straightforward, but clearer guidance and improved transparency on timescales would help reduce delays and uncertainty.'

'Honestly, it can be quite an arduous process, with it being often very difficult to get things signed off.'

'I think Councillors of any particular ward should decide wholly what to use these for and have autonomy for this.'

'Unfortunately, the officer dealing with budgets is overwhelmed by demands, hence progress is very slow and can take up to a year or more.'

'The submission of proposals depends on which officer is assisting as to whether it is an easy or difficult / frustrating process; this inconsistency is sourced in the absence of any CPB criteria. This is, and has always been, unacceptable and raised on numerous occasions with officers, with no action taken to resolve the matter. Further, it is often the case when departments have regularly overspent their allocated budgets they seek to leverage unspent but identified projects from members budgets to ease their financial problems. This is viewed as the reason for the scrutiny topic submission and it is seen as to what it is, a money grab.'

3) Communication

Do you receive updates on proposal progress?

Yes:	22	No:	12

Do you have any other comments on CPB / WTB communication?

'Some of our proposals have got `forgotten about` and I have to send a reminder. Always have to ask for updates on the availability of funds and are only given current year not the 4-year spreadsheet.'

'[The supporting officer] keeps me updated.'

'I suppose I go through periods when I become impatient for updates because I am under pressure myself to deliver. That isn't always necessarily the officer's fault. However, there have been times when updates are not forthcoming, even after plenty of time has passed and little to no pressure applied for updates.'

'As before, staff handling proposals do not have the capacity to communicate in a timely manner.'

'Projected timescales and any amendments would be helpful to be able to advise residents.'

'Certain officers are very good when it comes to communication and some are not. Continually having to chase for updates is not right and is frustrating to us as Elected Members and our residents.'

'Sometimes – usually when it's either done, or it's the millionth time we've been told we can't do that without much of an explanation.'

'Communication can sometimes be lacking due to the workload of the officer dealing with the process.'

'Communication does happen to an extent but largely depends on the Councillor chasing it. Things just seem to get bogged down in the system, with very patchy communication.'

'Very slow.'

'Poor.'

'As always, communication could be better but it is satisfactory.'

'As a new Ward Councillor, it would have been useful if someone had explained that these budgets were available and scope of usage. Also, how much is made available, how it's calculated, and when allocated.'

'Whilst I receive updates, its usually only when I've requested an update.'

'Communication could be improved, particularly in raising awareness among residents and providing clearer, more consistent information.'

4) Delivery

How satisfied are you with the delivery of approved works?

Satisfied:	13	Neutral:	13	Dissatisfied:	8

If dissatisfied, has this affected your willingness to propose further schemes?

Yes, significantly:	0	Yes, somewhat:	8	No:	14

Do you have any other comments on the delivery process?

'Generally have to keep asking officers for updates / dates for schemes to be implemented. Would be great if we could have regular updates of where we are at in the scheme and approximate implementation dates.'

'Needs to be as simple approach and execution as possible and not to over administrate this.'

'The delivery process works well overall, but clearer timelines and more regular updates would improve transparency and reduce delays.'

'Excessive costs are prohibitive and extortionate. Bulb planting costs are totally unrealistic so buy ourselves. Need to select carefully to get value for money for our residents. Save budgets for larger schemes.'

'Generally, I believe it takes longer now to see schemes materialise than when I was a 'newer' member. This can become quite frustrating, however, there have also been instances when a scheme has been delivered incredibly quickly.'

'Needs to be quicker.'

'Occasionally, projects take some time but understand there is not just my ward needing work done.'

'Greater input from Councillors and residents on projects and delivery. Helps with projects that would never be put into practice.'

'Process is completely under-resourced and takes far too long. Reluctant to propose new schemes until we know outcome of previous ones. Once approved, it then joins a long queue to get included on the work programme.'

'Waiting times for delivery are unacceptable and have worsened in my time as a Councillor.'

'Due to the workload of the officer dealing with the Ward and Transport participation budget, I often find it difficult to progress schemes. This is further complicated due to the lack of scope available within Council departments to actually complete the scheme. This can be frustrating and, at present, I have several outstanding schemes awaiting completion.'

'Often takes a long time to process.'

'While delivery is fine, it is the cost of delivery that I have a problem with. Our budgets are modest in size and allow us autonomy in our wards. However, the pricing used by the Council is restrictive and in cases absurd which eats into our budgets.'

'More staff need to be directed in processing requests.'

'There are times when what we have been delivered is not exactly what we asked for. This may be due to Chinese whispers as we do not have direct contact with the person who is designing the job. Also, our inability to interpret the drawings correctly.'

'We just wanted some simple parking bays in the side of a field that wasn't really used for a street with poor parking. With regular bays, we could have had space for four cars. Instead, they gave us bays for parallel parking, with a completely unnecessary path around it, and left it in a mess for months. They send us small technical drawings that are quite difficult to decipher as someone who isn't a specialist in that, and I've made the error of wrongly assuming that it would be what we've asked for and they would tell us if there were changes to it. Instead, we're sent that and have to try and spot the many changes that have been made.'

'The delivery process is frustrating; Members view the allocation of the WTB / CPB as being vitally important to deliver projects outside of the Council-led programme. On each occasion, it is evidenced that a great deal is sliced off to recover costs into the department's budget for resources, particularly salaries and administrative costs.'

5) Budget Management

Are you informed of how much your annual Ward allocation is for CPB and WTB within one financial year?

Yes:	22	No:	12

Should Members be allowed to carry forward unspent budget?

Yes, always:	29	Yes, but only in exceptional circumstances:	0
Yes, but only with an identified scheme:	5	No:	0

Do you feel the current level of flexibility in how CPB / WTB can be used is appropriate?

Yes:	18	No:	16

Do you think the ongoing cost of maintaining assets or services introduced through CPB or WTB funding should be met through individual members' budgets rather than central funding?

Yes:	10	No:	24

Should Ward Councillors continue to be able to pool CPB and / or WTB funding with neighbouring wards to deliver shared schemes?

Yes:	33	No:	1

Do you have any other comments on the CPB / WTB budget management process?

'Potentially to allow Members greater control of CPB to shop around themselves rather than overinflated Council prices.'

'WTB has limited flexibility in what it can be used for. Often solutions are financially out of reach for this fund.'

'If ward budgets cannot be enhanced across the board, I believe that more money should be put into the most deprived wards where the needs are the greatest.'

(Regarding carry forward of unspent budgets) 'Those schemes identified sometimes require multi-year commitment to setting aside the budget; however, upon delivery, the budget has not taken account of inflation and other costs. The budgets have remained static for a number of years, but with costs rising. This is unacceptable for SBC to support and manage budgets.'

'More flexibility on what we use it for.'

'Budgets are vastly underspent because of difficulty and delays in getting schemes to fruition. Whole process is understaffed, with one staff member covering all wards along with other duties; he does his best but needs support. This is a valuable resource for dedicated Councillors and process should be easier and less time-consuming; we promise residents resolution which can take years to deliver!'

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'Quarterly review with officers championing this with relevant Councillors of use, non-use and potential use will be of assistance and help to raise awareness of these budgets, and also the maximum potential that can be used as some residents have a larger expectation of the pot size in cases and are quite surprised when we have to say 'no', or that we feel whilst a genuine ask, the budget will not stretch to cover the ask so we cannot really pursue.'

'Allowing budgets to be carried forward helps with projects that would never be completed. The flexibility is good for helping to achieve goals that, without the budgets, would never be delivered. Working together could be good on certain projects where costs would be inflated and never be completed for residents.'

'The process is generally sound, but improved transparency and clearer oversight would strengthen budget management.'

'Regular updates would be helpful rather than having to request information.'

'We only get budget info if requested. We should receive or view up-to-date info including committed spends.'

'I am aware that colleagues need to save money through multiple years to pay for a large project. Therefore, I don't see the issue for a ward to carry money forward. However, I think that if there appears to be a situation where Members are struggling to find 'things' to spend their funds on, officers should be more proactive to reach out to state what the funding could go towards. Under such circumstances, perhaps the funds could go to something unrelated to the CPB / WTB policy, such as supporting a SBC maintained school with a certain budget pressure, etc.'

'The management process for CPB and WTB has become increasingly difficult and less transparent in recent years. Previously, Councillors received regular and accessible updates on remaining balances and committed spend, allowing wards to plan effectively for both short-term and long-term projects. That process has deteriorated significantly, with Councillors now frequently having to chase officers for basic budget information, often waiting considerable periods for responses.

This lack of readily available financial information makes it unnecessarily difficult for Councillors to understand exactly what funding remains available and what has already been committed. For budgets intended to support responsive local decision-making, this creates avoidable delays and uncertainty.

A further major issue is the excessive internal charging structure applied to CPB and WTB projects. The costs quoted for relatively straightforward interventions are often extraordinarily high and severely restrict what Councillors can realistically deliver within their wards…'

6) *Impact & Effectiveness*

How much impact do you believe CPB-funded projects have in your ward?

High impact:	**25**	Low impact:	**0**	No impact:	**0**
Moderate impact:	**9**	Very low impact:	**0**		

How much impact do you believe WTB-funded projects have in your ward?

High impact:	**23**	Low impact:	**1**	No impact:	**0**
Moderate impact:	**10**	Very low impact:	**0**		

Do you have any other comments on the impact & effectiveness of the CPB / WTB process?

'The CPB and WTB are more valuable now than ever. These initiatives allow us to respond to highlighted issues in our ward while also allowing us to pool money from different financial years to facilitate a larger vision / project. Without these budgets, we would lose so much and it would negatively impact on our ability to deliver within our ward.'

'Could be a more streamlined process, with adequate resources.'

'Residents do not always see where their Council tax is spent and value initiatives in their communities. This is a neighbourhood / ward budget that does have an impact.'

'I think the projects that have been done in the wards should be published (perhaps in Stockton News).'

'The CPB and WTB have a clear and positive impact, delivering visible improvements and real benefits to local communities.'

'I don't think the spending outcomes should be considered on how big their impact is. Sometimes funding may go towards a project that doesn't have a big impact, but it does make a difference. Furthermore, had the funding not come from CPB or WTB, it probably wouldn't come from anywhere else.'

'If we could spend these budgets on a wider range of projects then they would have a bigger impact.'

'The relatively small budget limits the impact. However, agility of use on small jobs can have a high impact in a very localised area of the ward.'

'CPB and WTB budgets are one of the last remaining examples of genuine localism within Stockton and should be increased, not reduced or removed. Any move to remove or dilute these budgets would represent a clear centralisation of power away from local communities and Ward Councillors into the hands of the current administration and senior officers.'

'CPB-funded projects have a high impact on my ward as it is what residents are asking for and it matters to them enormously. WTB projects are difficult to fulfil as the cost of many projects that the residents would like far exceed the WTB, such as traffic calming. So I agree that the unused budgets be rolled over to the next year to fund larger schemes.'

'We've been able to do so little because we keep being told 'no'. We have a lot of budget left because we keep being told 'no', often without much explanation. Even if we get something approved now, it's unlikely to be in place for the election, so residents don't think we've done much, when actually we've tried so, so hard to spend it. It also often feels like officers have particular things they would like us to spend it on, because they don't want it coming out of other budgets. The longer I spend as a Councillor, the more it feels like the system isn't designed to benefit us or our residents.'

'I believe they would have more impact if they were completed within a more appropriate timescale. Targets should be set for engineering projects and if not an investigation should happen to find out why and improved processes put in place to correct it so the issue does not arise again.'

'The flexibility of these budgets is one of their greatest strengths. Ward Councillors understand the specific needs of their communities far better than centralised Council processes and are therefore best placed to determine local priorities. The budgets themselves are highly effective. The frustrations and inefficiencies that exist largely stem from internal Council processes, excessive charging structures and poor budget transparency, rather than any failing on the part of Councillors or residents.'

7) Future Direction

Should the CPB and WTB schemes continue in their current form?

Yes:	**19**	Yes, with major changes:	**3**
Yes, with minor changes:	**12**	No:	**0**

Are you aware that your CPB allocation can be used to part fund or top up your WTB budget to deliver highways and transport schemes?

Yes:	**30**	No:	**3**

Do you have any other comments on the CPB/WTB process?

'The budget should be allocated on areas of need and deprivation. Some affluent wards struggle to find schemes to use up their budgets and end up with things like pretty hanging baskets, whilst other deprived wards, which are desperate for resources, cannot fund anywhere near the demands of their communities.'

'Combine both budgets.'

'We must leave it as it is.'

'I feel that dropped kerbs should be funded from the central budget.'

'Many Councillors deliberately save and pool their allocations over several years in order to deliver larger scale projects and long term improvements that would otherwise never happen in their wards. Removing or reducing these budgets would directly undermine that ability to plan and invest locally.'

'The biggest issue with both budgets is down to the management and progression of identified schemes.'

'Retaining CPB and WTB is a vital link between elected Cllrs and their local communities, delivering local projects which enhance the area.'

'Greater Councillor input is key. Without these budgets, nothing would get done.'

'It is getting more and more difficult to progress schemes. This is not a reflection on any particular staff member as he does his best to cope under enormous pressure. I would like to be kept better informed as to what is happening but am reluctant to bother him and pile on more pressure.'

'Must be kept. Increase amount. Review internal charges.'

'We should allow flexibility in how Councillors spend these budgets, allowing them to get value for Council taxpayers money. Reducing internal costs to realistic levels would help deliver for our residents. We must protect these decisions made locally for the benefit of our communities.'

'The budgets should continue to be separate as there may be confusion between capital and revenue spending.'

'I think CPB and WTB should be combined to make one budget, that has the scope of both budgets. I think administratively this would make the process easier.'

'Officer support appears to be under-resourced.'

'The CPB / WTB process is effective overall, but could benefit from greater consistency, clearer guidance, and continued focus on timely delivery to maximise impact.'

Views of local Town & Parish Councils

4.29. On 29 May 2026, the Committee issued a survey to the Borough's Town Councils (4) and Parish Councils (12) on this scrutiny topic. Six responses were received before the survey closed on 17 July 2026, with anonymised feedback outlined below:

1) *Is your Town / Parish Council aware of the **Community Participation Budget (CPB)** that provides SBC Ward Councillors a small budget which, through engagement with the local community, can be used to fund eligible projects within their wards?*

'Until our new clerk arrived who has experience of Councillor Neighbourhood Budgets, our Parish Council was not aware.'

'Yes'

'Yes, but unsure of the total amount.'

'Yes'

[redacted] use their allocation on their "pet projects".'

'Currently as a councillor since 2023 then moved onto the Clerk to [redacted] Parish council this community budget has never been mentioned within the meetings that I am aware of.'

2) *Is your Town / Parish Council aware of the **Ward Transport Budget (WTB)** that provides SBC Ward Councillors a small budget which, through engagement with the local community, can be used to fund eligible projects within their wards?*

'Yes'

'No'

'Yes'

[redacted] use their allocation on their "pet projects".'

'Yes, but unsure of the total amount.'

'The ward councillor has never to my knowledge mentioned that a budget was available from Stockton Borough Council. It may benefit the Parish councils to be given an indication of funding available at the beginning of each new financial year, that does not necessarily mean it is an open pot however I would expect each proposal to stand on its own merits if approved.'

3) *Has your Town / Parish Council ever been approached by either SBC or your respective SBC Ward Councillor regarding a CPB or WTB-related project?*

'No we have had to ask and [redacted] use their allocation on their "pet projects".'

'The SBC ward Councillors are invited to send a 'Ward Report' to our monthly Town Council Meetings. We receive regular reports for [redacted] who detail if schemes using their CPB are used. Unfortunately [redacted] Ward Councillors rarely submit such a report and we rely on Social Media to find out about schemes.'

'Yes - both CTB and WTB related projects.'

'Only recently because we have asked for money.'

'Yes'

'Whilst I have been on the [redacted] Parish Council since 2023 the budget schemes have never been mentioned, whilst the [redacted] is a small monetary budget, had I been aware I think a request may have been put forward!!'

4) *Can you give any examples of joint-working with SBC / SBC Ward Councillors on CPB or WTB-related schemes?*

'In recent years the Parish Council has requested the following items that were subsequently funded by the CPB or WTB:-

- A dropped kerb to improve access to the village hall
- Chevron signs on [redacted] - which do seem to have helped to reduce the number of cars running off the road
- Various bins and benches
- Speed limit reductions between [redacted] and [redacted]
- Tree Planting.'

'Playground equipment in 2026.'

'Installation of CCTV; potential collaboration with Town Council, SBC and the Police re: antisocial behaviour in [redacted].'

'None known.'

'N/A'

'We have asked for money for Christmas lights, benches, playground equipment.'

5) *Can you give any examples of your Town / Parish Council undertaking or completing environmental or transport-related schemes that are / were not linked to either the CPB or WTB?*

'None, because we did not know we could get this money.'

'The Parish Council carries out environmental work not linked to the CPB on its own land around the Parish such as provision of a community orchard, ongoing provision of a playground and football pitch, landscaping and access improvements to the war memorial site. The only transport related scheme that the Parish Council has funded was the provision of mobile 'no parking' signs for use outside of the village primary school. This project relies on staff having the time to place the signs at the start and the end of the school day. The cost of other transport schemes are too high for the Parish Council to be able to consider funding from its limited resources.'

'No'

'Installed Benches, Wildflower displays, Litter Picking grants.'

'The only work undertaken within [redacted] off memory was the traffic calming scheme in October 2004, unfortunately as a resident of [redacted] that is the only scheme that comes to mind.'

'We are trying to get SBC to add 2 x toucan crossings, but they ran out of money in 2024 and never bothered to tell the Parish Councils similarly they didn't tell us about [redacted] Cycle Path being cut short, it was disgusting to read this in the [redacted] Newsletter.'

6) *Would your Town / Parish Council welcome more involvement / engagement with the CPB and WTB? If so, how would you like this to happen?*

'To share the funding out rather than [redacted] use their allocation on their "pet projects".'

'Yes, we would like updates via emails and meetings and for Councillors to be transparent.'

'Yes. This could be done by publishing transparent criteria and a published timeline, receiving regular updates on available funds, approved projects and upcoming opportunities. Each [redacted] Town Council ward receives an annual, small, community ward budget. This funding could be used to support projects that are funded through the CPB/WTB, enabling effective partnership working between the Town Council and Stockton Borough Council.'

'My original thoughts still apply that the Parish council are to be made aware of SBC funding at the beginning of the financial year, then potential projects forwarded to be considered on their merits & benefits to the community.'

'Yes. Info on the amount of budget for the area, what has been spent and on what project.'

'The current system of discussing possible projects for the WTB and CPB with SBC Ward Councillors at Parish Council meetings is working well. The Ward Councillors regularly attend the PC meetings and are open to considering requests from the Parish Council that reflect the needs of the local residents.'

7) *Given the existence of the CPB and WTB, what would be the priority for your Town / Parish Council in terms of potential project proposals?*

'Repairing potholes and re-surfacing the roads when the number of potholes becomes un-manageable; effective traffic calming; a CCTV system. An increased CPB and WTB budget that reflects the land area of the Ward. With the rural wards the budgets have to be divided across many villages, all of which have different needs and priorities. In the urban wards one project funded by the CPB or WTB could be of benefit to the majority of the residents in that ward as they all live in a more concentrated area. In the rural wards this is less likely to be the case as one project is often only of benefit to one village.

The Parish Councillors think it is important that the SBC Ward Councillors continue to have a dedicated budget that they can allocate for use in the Wards they represent. It is felt that if the funding was allocated from a more central fund, as it has been in the past, the rural areas with the lower populations will lose out to the urban areas.'

'Discussions with the Parish councillors at meetings to understand their thoughts on potential schemes, again as stated earlier it has to benefit the community in our local Parishes.'

'Deliver 20mph zone around [redacted] Primary School and [redacted] Playground, install pedestrian crossings on [redacted] Road, contribution towards new playground equipment.'

'Christmas Lights, War Memorial Repairs, Speed Signs, Playground Equipment, Pedestrian Crossings, new litter bins, new benches, grants for allotment toilets.'

- 'Projects that address anti-social behaviour / youth engagement
- Health and wellbeing initiatives
- Initiatives that support families
- Projects that improve local amenities, safety and accessibility.'

'Road adoptions, potholes, traffic calming.'

Views of local residents

4.30. On 5 June 2026, the Committee issued a survey to local residents (circulated to existing engagement mechanisms via the SBC Community Engagement Team) on this scrutiny topic. A total of 97 responses were received before the survey closed on 3 July 2026 – feedback and selected quotes are outlined as follows:

1) *Are you aware of the **Community Participation Budget (CPB)** that provides SBC Ward Councillors a small budget which, through engagement with the local community, can be used to fund eligible projects within their wards?*

Yes:	**30**	No:	**67**

2) *Are you aware of the **Ward Transport Budget (WTB)** that provides SBC Ward Councillors a small budget which, through engagement with the local community, can be used to fund eligible projects within their wards?*

Yes:	**16**	No:	**81**

3) *Have you ever engaged with your SBC Ward Councillor regarding a CPB or WTB-related project / proposal?*

Yes:	**8**	No:	**89**

4) *If you answered 'yes' to question 3, was the project / proposal implemented? If not, do you know why?*

'No. It concerned a proposed cycle path which although local seemed was outside the scope of a CPB or WTB and was passed on to SBC. Subsequent to this it seems to have gone into a black hole.'

'Yes the proposal was implemented. It was in relation to some tree planting to replace trees which had been planted by developers and had then died.'

'Many years ago, myself and a neighbour approached our ward councillor with regards to the antisocial behaviour of youths gathering on the external staircase leading to our flats and wondered if is was possible to have the access gate removed to the foot of the stairs rather than half way up and for the walls to be built up. I am unsure if the councillor did this out of her budget for the area or if it was Stockton Council themselves, but it was implemented.'

'Requested that a street sign be put up at end of road. No one had noticed that there was not one.'

'We have had support with planters, dog bins, dropped kerbs and having a chicane relocated.'

5) *Do you belong to any resident / community group within the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees?*

Yes:	**15**	No:	**81**	Not Answered:	**1**

6) *If you answered 'yes' to question 5, would your resident / community group welcome more involvement / engagement with these two budget schemes? If so, how would you like this to happen?*

'Yes, emails sent to residents.'

'Thornaby warm welcome group may benefit from a scheme.'

'Can you let me have more information regarding the qualifying criteria to receive a grant? I'm a member of two Stockton based choirs... I'm sure both would welcome contributions towards their running costs.'

'Yes, by promoting the contact details.'

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'Yes have the details of the two budget schemes emailed.'

'Neighbourhood watch.'

'Yes I think the councillors should reach out to community groups, rather than community groups having to contact them. Perhaps they could raise more awareness of these pots of money and how they can be used by community groups.'

'Yes it would like to be involved. If the ward councillors attended residents association meetings and explained about their budgets and listened to suggestions that would be helpful.'

7) *Given the existence of these two budget schemes, what would be the priority for you in terms of potential project proposals within your locality?*

Comments / suggestions included:

- 'Better transport, fix potholes, better thought on implications of house building especially on A689.'
- 'The Elmtree beck is very badly overgrown - please tidy it up.'
- 'A ward scheme to monitor scooter riders / motorbike riders that annoy everyone.'
- 'As I was unaware of them and do not know what they are for, it is impossible to answer this question.'
- 'Monthly waste skips for residents large unwanted items.'
- 'Knowing more about the schemes, knowing what has been asked for and what's been considered, what the outcomes of suggestions have been, what was successful, how many people benefited.'
- 'Sort the public footpath out between Duneside and Dillside for school children and parents walking across. Not wide enough and murder in winter due to spring / water seepage flooding ground.'
- 'Explaining to the public what these schemes encompass and budgets that are available.'
- 'Security cameras and anti-social behaviour problems.'
- 'Potholes, anti-social behaviour, dog fouling.'
- 'Make their existence or possibility of being proposed and brought into existence known to the resident taxpayers.'
- 'Tidy up the open spaces on Bassleton Lane. Improve cycleways.'
- 'Try to combat pavement parking to support the elderly and disabled.'
- 'Use the budget to set up a community space. Currently, Wynyard has zero community facilities. Failing that, use budget to improve pedestrian / cycle routes from Wynyard to Wynyard Road / Billingham.'
- 'I think someone needs to start looking at the way vehicles park and taking them to prosecution.'
- 'If my Ward Councillors had a newsletter (even an online one), they could keep us in touch with proposals. Although I knew the CPB existed, I have no idea if it has been used in my ward. Never heard of the other fund.'
- 'Provide more fruit trees to create 'free to eat' orchards.'
- 'More dog waste bins, a campaign to get people to pick up their dog waste and request some officers to distribute fines.'
- 'Speed control measures. Village improvements e.g. planters, flower beds and tidied local amenities such as the play park and overall ground maintenance.'

4.31. Reflecting on the data provided, the Committee felt there was a clear need for SBC to strengthen communication of these budget schemes to the public, with Members providing examples of how they as Ward Councillors engaged local residents in proposed projects (e.g. letters seeking views, newsletter updates). Officers emphasised the need for residents to understand that these were Member-led schemes rather than Council-led interventions, and that the public recognise that these projects arise from Members listening to the community.

Other Local Authority approaches to Member-led schemes

4.32. Comparisons with other North East Local Authority Member-related budget schemes demonstrated variance in the level of funding available, along with differences in governance and control, and project eligibility / purpose. The below graphic highlighted the budget models, key features and key constraints of similar schemes operated by Hartlepool, South Tyneside, Durham, Northumberland, Doncaster and Stockton-on-Tees Councils.

Authority	Budget Model	Key Features	Key Constraints
Hartlepool	❌ No member budget	Previously £3–5k	Strict evidence-led prioritisation
South Tyneside	✅ Pooled CAF budgets	Schemes voted across wards	Less individual control
Durham	✅ £19k per councillor	Broad community schemes	Not highways-focused
Northumberland	✅ Capital MLIS programme	Asset-based schemes	No revenue allowed
Doncaster	✅ £3k per Member	Community & voluntary funding	Limited scope for highways
Stockton	✅ CPB & WTB split	Member input + officer control	Capacity and eligibility constraints

4.33. Although funding models differed quite considerably between these six Local Authorities, there were common challenges around revenue and maintenance pressures, expectations versus deliverability, and officer capacity and competing priorities. Highways-related projects were becoming increasingly evidence-led (a national trend), but Member budgets did allow for some flexibility (albeit within limits). It was felt that the current model in Stockton-on-Tees provided a balance between project flexibility and control, but that SBC was experiencing similar challenges to other Local Authorities in terms of operating such budget schemes.

4.34. A paper highlighting further Member-related budget schemes offered by Local Authorities across the country (including links for further detail) was also provided to the Committee in May 2026:

- **Cheshire West and Chester Council**
  Member Budget Scheme Guidance Note 2026-2027
  https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/asset-library/member-budget-scheme-guidance-2026-27.pdf

  - £5,000 per Member (2026-2027)
  - Published timetable for applications to be received / processed / paid
  - Published process for applications and basic criteria which needs to be met (including links to guidance, Cheshire's crowdfunding scheme, and potential external funding support)

- **City of Doncaster Council**
  Councillors' Ward Budgets
  https://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/the-council-democracy/councillors-ward-budgets

  - £3,000 per Member
  - Can be allocated to voluntary and not-for-profit groups
  - Published terms and conditions, and examples of previous allocations

- **City of Stoke-on-Trent**
  Ward and Environment Budget Launched for 2024/25
  Building Better Neighbourhoods: Ward and Environment Budget Launched for 2024/25 | Stoke-on-Trent

  - 'Ward Budget Spend' included on each Councillor's personal webpage (e.g. https://www.stoke.gov.uk/homepage/84/councillor_spend_breakdown?uid=45712)

Councillor Lynn Watkins

Councillor Details

Previous Year

1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027

Budget: £5000
Spend : £3648

All Councillors have a dedicated budget of £5,000 per year to address local priorities and issues within their wards, as identified through their local communities.

This is a Councillor-led process, and it is the responsibility of Ward Councillors to promote its availability and encourage individuals and groups to submit suggestions for proposed projects and needed work within their Ward.

IMPORTANT - evidence of your account details must be provided when completing the application as this will delay payment.

Organisation	Amount	Approved date	Project
Food Bank (Stephens Church)	£100	22/09/2026	Contributions towards The foodbank has started back up in St Stephens church and is being run alongside Jericho by the Jericho volunteers
Burslem Remembers Steering Group	£100	22/09/2026	Contributions towards a memorial of those from across the city who lost their lives in WW1, 2 and later of those who worked, lived in Burslem- based on extensive local research
Potteries helping hands dementia group CIC	£150	25/08/2026	Contributions towards a visit to the National Memorial Arboretum

- **City of Westminster**
  Apply for Ward Budget funding
  https://www.westminster.gov.uk/about-council/democracy/apply-ward-budget-funding

  - £46,000 per ward (annually)
  - Money not used carries-forward to next year (within four-year Council cycle)
  - Published case studies and endorsements

- **Hillingdon Council**
  Ward budget scheme
  https://pre.hillingdon.gov.uk/strategies-policies-projects/ward-budget-scheme

  - Published breakdown of projects funded from May 2022 – November 2023 (including graphics – see overleaf)

Eastcote

- Refurbishment of the kitchen in St Lawrence Church - £3,000
- A defibrillator for Deane Park and Bessingby Park Bowls Club - £1,175
- The removal of old trees and planting of new trees within the Wild Orchard at Eastcote House Gardens - £700
- Installation of a toddler swing at Pembroke Park Estate, Coleridge Drive - £750
- Paris 2023 trip and additional stationary for 5th Eastcote Methodist Church Guides - £800

- **North Yorkshire Council**
  Councillor locality budgets
  https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/community-and-volunteering/councillor-locality-budgets

  - £5,000 per Member (annually)
  - Published funding allocations that have been approved

- **Oxford City Council**
  Funding from your local ward councillor
  https://www.oxford.gov.uk/grants/funding-local-ward-councillor

  - £1,500 per Member (annually)
  - Published spend data

- **Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council**
  Ward Budget Summaries
  https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/homepage/233/ward-budget-summaries

  - Two funds: Community Leadership Fund (CLF) and a ward capital budget
  - CLF budgets are managed by individual councillors – the ward capital budget is managed by all ward councillors collectively
  - Published ward budget summaries (annually)

- **Royal Borough of Greenwich**
  Ward budget funding for local projects
  https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/info/200245/grants/1954/ward_budget_funding_for_local_projects

  - £16,500 for wards with three Councillors (over four-year Council term); £11,000 for wards with two Councillors
  - Published list of funded projects / previous schemes (including interactive maps)

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Please see our interactive map below for examples of projects funded through the current scheme

- **Wealden District Council**
  Councillor Ward Budgets Scheme
  https://www.wealden.gov.uk/councillors-and-committees/councillor-ward-budgets-scheme/

  - £10,000 per Member (annually)
  - Published application deadline
  - Published list of decisions (including reason and amount applied for / approved)

4.35. Again, whilst it was recognised that funding allocations and processes / governance differed from the SBC model, it was also apparent that these schemes were very transparent to the public. Councils elsewhere provided individual Ward Councillor spend (City of Stoke-on-Trent), a breakdown of projects funded along with photographic evidence (Hillingdon), and interactive maps of projects completed through their current scheme (Royal Borough of Greenwich).

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5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

5.1. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) provides Elected Members (also known as Ward Councillors) with two budget schemes that, through engagement with the local community, can be used to fund project ideas within their wards. Whilst these are generally small-scale and local in character, they connect directly with resident concerns and can have a significant impact on social and environmental wellbeing. Both budgets are Council funds, where Members influence priorities and officers retain overall responsibility for determining validity and for delivery.

5.2. Introduced in 2007 as the 'Small Environmental Improvements Budget' (providing a modest, flexible funding mechanism for local environmental works that were not prioritised through core budgets), this scheme was later re-named the **Community Participation Budget (CPB)** to reflect community participation and Member input, with SBC Ward Councillors promoting projects based on local priorities. The CPB is revenue funding which has been identified within the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and supports broader community-focused capital works.

5.3. The **Ward Transport Budget (WTB)** began following a SBC Place Select Committee review of the Area Transport Strategy in 2019 which saw the budget move from an area-based pot that Members would bid into to obtain funds to ward-based allocations (making it easier for Members to access). WTB is capital funding from the Council's annual allocation towards highway priorities from the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement, operates within a structured, evidence-led framework, and is strictly transport-focused (spending is audited to ensure it is directed toward transport priorities).

5.4. Both CPB (£200,000 per annum) and WTB (£150,000 per annum) allocations are divided between wards based on population. It is important to note that the CPB can match-fund WTB schemes where there may be a shortfall in available budget. Conversely, WTB funding cannot be used for CPB projects as the latter are more environmentally focused (rather than transport-related).

5.5. The CPB and WTB can be directed towards local issues where the concerns of constituents do not meet the evidence thresholds for funding via core budgets. SBC offers further flexibility with regard carry-forward of unspent funding into the following year (subject to Cabinet Member approval), the ability to draw down from the following year's allocation early if a larger project exceeded a single year's funding, and the option of pooling budgets with neighbouring wards. However, a caveat also exists that unspent allocations may be re-absorbed or re-allocated (a decision that would ultimately be taken by the Cabinet Member, depending on the Council's financial position) – something which should prompt all Ward Councillors and their respective residents to ensure potential projects are identified and submitted.

5.6. As of mid-2026, the Committee was informed that both budget schemes had a significant underspend for the 2025-2026 and early-2026-2027 period (58% for the CPB and 73% for the WTB), though it was also acknowledged that much of this could be attributed to limitations on the capacity to develop and deliver projects, as well as a frequent need to follow statutory procedures, rather than a lack of demand. Indeed, subsequent evidence showed that numerous proposals (worth an estimated £340,000) had been submitted and were still being assessed or were now in programme.

5.7. Whilst there had been a clear effort to provide guidance on the types of projects that would be eligible under each scheme, comments from some Ward Councillors appeared to show an element of confusion and disillusionment around what these budgets should be used for. Concern was raised over allocations being spent on work that, in the view of Ward Councillors, should be covered by core funding rather than the CPB or WTB.

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5.8. Two key issues were identified following the submission of project ideas; 1) the potential for proposals to create ongoing revenue or maintenance costs, and 2) required officer time spent on developing schemes, many of which are then not progressed through to implementation. Whilst these were important factors, the most pressing concern in relation to receiving and determining submissions centred on the significant limitations in officer resource (with only one dedicated staff member processing proposals from 27 wards and 56 Ward Councillors) – a critical pinch point which, alongside delays sometimes created by the need for statutory duties to be observed, appears to undermine the ability to make local improvements in a timely fashion.

5.9. SBC Ward Councillors (34) who responded to a Committee survey were almost unanimously aware of the eligibility criteria for both the CPB and WTB, though some expressed a desire for this to be simplified / widened so the wishes of residents and their representative/s could be satisfied. Other themes that emerged from the feedback received included CPB and WTB allocations having to be used for projects that, in their opinion, should be funded through central budgets, high / excessive quotes (work could / should be done for less), limited officer capacity to process submitted proposals (with delays sometimes leading to increased costs), and the time taken from submission of a proposal to it being realised (if approved). A lack of appropriate updates on progress of a proposal was a frequently aired concern (though 22 of the 34 survey respondents stated they did receive updates) – time will tell if the new online case management platform enables improved communication with Councillors – with only 38% (13) of Elected Members 'satisfied' with the delivery of approved works.

5.10. Although eliciting a limited response (6 of 16), the Committee's survey of local Town and Parish Councils revealed both a lack of awareness of these budget schemes from some, and examples where the CPB and / or the WTB had helped fund projects from others. There was a clear appetite for greater clarity and communication with Town and Parish Councils in relation to these funding pots, with numerous suggestions put forward on what they could contribute towards.

5.11. A large majority of the 97 residents who responded to a further Committee survey (issued via the SBC Community Engagement Team) were unaware of the CPB (67) and WTB (81), with only eight having engaged with their respective SBC Ward Councillor regarding a CPB or WTB-related project / proposal. There were repeated calls for more information and transparency around these budget schemes (including from those who belonged to resident / community groups), along with a vast range of views on what the allocated funding might be used for. The Committee recognises the number of responses reflects a very small proportion of the Borough's population, but feedback nevertheless provides an indication of a lack of public awareness which the Council and its Ward Councillors have a responsibility to grow.

5.12. Research on similar Member-led budget models used by other Local Authorities demonstrated differences in available funding, governance / control measures, and project eligibility, though also highlighted the same experiences in terms of the creation of revenue / maintenance pressures, expectations versus deliverability, and officer capacity. One key difference between SBC and other Local Authorities was the transparency of such schemes to the public, with several examples provided where local residents were able to see individual Ward Councillor spend (City of Stoke-on-Trent), a breakdown of projects funded along with photographic evidence (Hillingdon), and interactive maps of projects completed through their current scheme (Royal Borough of Greenwich).

5.13. The CPB and WTB are laudable funding schemes that have delivered tangible benefits across Stockton-on-Tees, but evidence also suggests they are not working as efficiently as they could / should. It is clear that Ward Councillors greatly value these budgets (with 31 of the 34 survey respondents wanting both schemes to continue in their current form or with minor changes), but there appears to be a fundamental flaw around the level of resource (only one dedicated officer) to support the determination of, and communication around, project proposals, as well as issues in relation to eligibility criteria and quoted costs which need to be considered. Furthermore, given

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the essence of these budgets is to address resident concerns, it is incumbent upon both SBC and its Ward Councillors to ensure local people are regularly made aware of the opportunities these schemes offer (though if frustrations already exist around the time taken from submission of a proposal to it being realised, this will only increase the pressure on assessing, determining and implementing projects). These budget schemes continue to be a democratic means of addressing local issues, and greater efficiency in proceeding from proposal to decision (and then, if approved, to delivery) will strengthen their credibility in the eyes of both Ward Councillors and the residents they serve.

Recommendations

The Committee recommend that:

1) **Both the Community Participation Budget (CPB) and the Ward Transport Budget (WTB) should remain as separate Member-led schemes.**

2) **With due regard to the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Ward Councillor survey feedback, SBC reviews and refreshes the guidance available to SBC Ward Councillors on CPB and WTB eligibility criteria and scheme delivery processes (which should include approximate timelines involved in the most common project proposals).**

3) **SBC considers creating additional resource to support the processing of CPB / WTB proposals (and subsequent communication on these to SBC Ward Councillors).**

4) **SBC continues to develop, and then implements, its new CPB / WTB-related digital case management and submission system (to include a Members Briefing at the appropriate time).**

5) **SBC strengthens processes around communication between relevant SBC Ward Councillors and officers designing a CPB / WTB scheme if, after feasibility checks are undertaken, environmental or other factors mean the original scope cannot be achieved.**

6) **Annual updates be provided to all SBC Ward Councillors on the state of CPB / WTB proposals (including the in-year and full four-year Council term budget position).**

7) **SBC Ward Councillors be supported to increase engagement with local resident and community groups to generate and discuss project proposals at ward level via Ward surgeries and Members newsletters.**

8) **To increase wider understanding and promotion of these budget schemes, SBC:**

   d) **publishes a short annual summary on its website of projects funded through CPB and WTB in each ward.**

   e) **uses its website to confirm budget allocations, processes for applications, any deadlines for season-specific works, and principal contacts for enquiries.**

   f) **periodically advertises its CPB / WTB website link to the Borough's Town and Parish Councils, and local residents, via all available communication mediums.**

9) **SBC introduces an annual report to the relevant SBC scrutiny committee on the CPB and WTB (allocations, proposals, spend, carry-forward, etc.).**

Glossary of Terms

ASB	**Anti-Social Behaviour**
CCTV	**Closed-Circuit Television**
CPB	**Community Participation Budget** (SBC)
DfT	**Department for Transport**
MTFP	**Medium-Term Financial Plan** (SBC)
NHT	**National Highways & Transport**
SBC	**Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council**
TRO	**Traffic Regulation Order**
WTB	**Ward Transport Budget** (SBC)

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