

Cabinet

A meeting of Cabinet was held on Thursday 17th September 2026.

- Present:** Cllr Lisa Evans (Leader of the Council), Cllr Pauline Beall (Cabinet Member), Cllr Clare Besford (Cabinet Member), Cllr Nigel Cooke (Cabinet Member), Cllr Richard Eglington (Cabinet Member), Cllr Paul Rowling (Cabinet Member) and Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE (Cabinet Member)
- Officers:** Mike Greene, Tracey Carter, Clare Harper, Majella McCarthy, Ged Morton, Carolyn Nice, Judy Trainer, Michelle Gunn, Kellie Hopkins, Vanessa Housley, Edwin Squire and Lisa Tague.
- Also in attendance:** Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Barbara Inman and Cllr Marilyn Surtees
- Apologies:** None.

CAB/168/25 Live Streaming

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

CAB/169/25 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

CAB/170/25 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

CAB/171/25 Minutes

Consideration was given to minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2026.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2026 be approved.

CAB/172/25 People Select Committee Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Provision

Consideration was given to a report by the People Select Committee following it's review of the Borough's post-16 education offer, including the factors affecting attraction, retention and the number of young people who become NEET.

It was explained that, although Stockton-on-Tees had a broad post-16 offer across five providers, enrolment had been affected by young people choosing out-of-borough provision and NEET rates remained high. A Post-16 Partnership was already bringing providers and relevant Council services together around excellence, communications and marketing, careers and transitions which was contributing to increased engagement, rising application numbers and stronger alignment with the local labour market. The Committee's recommendations build on that work, with particular emphasis on improving transitions, early identification of disengagement, careers

education, collaboration between providers, use of labour-market intelligence, enrichment opportunities, transport and coherent vocational pathways.

RESOLVED that:-

1. Transition support be strengthened by developing a consistent borough-wide transition framework between schools and post-16 providers, including clear pre-enrolment guidance, earlier course matching, data sharing, and structured support during the first term/end of Year 12 when drop-out risk was highest.
2. Early warning systems for flagging declining attendance, behaviour, and attainment be embedded across all post-16 providers with clear escalation and intervention pathways in place before disengagement reached crisis point.
3. Collaborative initiatives that showed signs of successfully assisting young people, such as Teach Meets, Skills for Success, and Business Mentor Support, be expanded to all providers, prioritising subjects with historically smaller student cohorts.
4. Communication between all providers and young people and their parents/carers regarding the Post-16 in-Borough offer be strengthened.
5. Careers education be embedded into the curriculum in all schools and post-16 providers to ensure young people choose the right pathways for them and reduce early withdrawal, including careers advice and post-16 options from Year 9 (or earlier), resources and staff training linking subjects to employment, and clear course expectations, progression routes and employment outcomes.
6. Labour-market intelligence and cohort growth data be utilised to plan academic, vocational and apprenticeship provision more strategically, to ensure capacity keeps pace with demand and competition between age groups does not disadvantage younger learners.
7. Cross-provider enrichment opportunities be broadened to not only create a more competitive offer compared with regional competitors but also raise aspirations.
8. Post-16 providers explore collaborative approaches and strategic networks to address transport barriers, highlighted as a significant influence on post-16 choice including connectivity to all in-Borough post-16 providers and cost, so young people can access efficient, cost effective in-borough provision.
9. Post-16 providers ensure that vocational courses provide coherent pathways to meet industry requirements.

CAB/173/25 Children and Young People Select Committee Scrutiny Review of Additionally Resourced SEND Provision

Members considered a report from the Children and Young People Select Committee.

It was explained that the Select Committee had started a review to understand implementation of the transfer of additionally resourced provision from September 2025, encourage further secondary-school applications and identify barriers to schools

becoming Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARPs). During the review, Government announced wider SEND reform and subsequently set out plans for Inclusion Hubs in all schools. In light of that national direction, the Committee decided not to continue the original review and instead summarised the evidence and key findings gathered to date for Cabinet.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

CAB/174/25 SEND Reform Programme – Education White Paper and Local Area Reform Plan Update

Cabinet received a report that report updated Cabinet on the national SEND Reform Programme and Stockton-on-Tees' Local Area Reform Plan (LARP), developed jointly with the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board and submitted to the Department for Education in June 2026.

The LARP focused on stronger mainstream inclusion, earlier identification and intervention, increased local sufficiency, reduced reliance on independent provision, improved Alternative Provision pathways and stronger partnership governance. The Council was awaiting the DfE assessment, expected in October 2026. Approval could result in High Needs Stability Funding of around £15.4m, approximately 90% of the £17.13m cumulative DSG High Needs deficit.

The report also proposed the use of the Council's £8.01m available High Needs capital resources for three schemes: a new 50-place SEMH school, expansion of the Early Support Nursery by up to 10 places, and 40 additional specialist primary places at Ash Trees Academy, together with programme contingency and associated delegations.

At the meeting, an addendum to the report was circulated detailing two additional recommendations. This added authority for the Director of Children's Services to act as the Council's authorised representative in Spark of Genius LLP in connection with the SEMH Special School, and delegated authority for contract awards and subsequent contract decisions required to deliver that project.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The closure of the national SEND Reform consultation and the submission of the Local Area Reform Plan to the Department for Education, be noted.
2. It be noted that Council and the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board were awaiting the outcome of the assessment process, expected in October 2026.
3. The significant financial implications of approval of the Local Area Reform Plan, including the potential write-off of approximately 90% of the cumulative DSG High Needs deficit, be noted .
4. The continued delivery of the SEND Reform Programme and associated transformation activity set out within the Local Area Reform Plan be endorsed.

5. The investment of up to £2m of capital funding, to create a new 50 place SEMH school, be agreed. This was to undertake necessary building work to adapt and expand an older building to create the required places.
6. The investment of £1.4m of capital funding to expand the existing Early Support Nursery to create up to 10 extra spaces, be agreed. This was to undertake necessary building work to adapt the existing provision to create the required places.
7. The investment of £3.75m of capital funding to expand the Ash Trees Academy Special School in building onto the Sandown Road site to create up to 40 additional specialist primary spaces, be agreed. This was to undertake necessary building work to adapt the existing provision to create the required places.
8. Delegated authority be given to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, to take all necessary steps to deliver the projects within the approved budgets.
9. Delegated authority to the transfer of budget caused by cost variations within the approved programme be given to the Section 151 Officer and the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport and the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.
10. Delegated authority be given to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the S151 officer and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, to allocate the contingency of £860,000 if required within the three schemes, within the approved programme.
11. Delegated authority be given to the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Director or Corporate Services to award the construction contract to deliver recommendation 1 to a value of £1.7m including variation, annual inflationary uplifts (where allowed in the contract terms and conditions) and extension decision.
12. The Director of Children's Services be appointed as the Council's authorised representative for the purposes of exercising the Council's rights as a Member of Spark of Genius LLP in relation to the SEMH Special School project and associated matters, including attendance at, participation in and voting at Members' meetings of the LLP.
13. Authority be delegated to the relevant Director or Assistant Director to make the specific contract award decision and any subsequent contract variation, annual inflationary uplifts (where allowed in the contract terms and conditions) and extension decision in respect of all contracts required to deliver the SEMH Special School project approved by the report.

**CAB/175/25 Local Area Special Educational Needs, Disabilities and Alternative Provision
OFSTED Inspection (ASEND)**

Cabinet considered a report relating to a recent inspection.

It was explained that Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission had undertaken a joint Area SEND inspection between 4 and 22 May 2026, examining arrangements across the Council, the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board and wider

partners. Inspectors concluded that local arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND, while also recognising a number of strengths and progress since the previous inspection.

Four areas for improvement were identified:

- transitions;
- the quality of Education, Health and Care Plans;
- consistency of SEND support and inclusion in schools; and
- waiting times for neurodevelopmental assessment and community paediatric services.

A multi-agency improvement plan had been developed and was due to be submitted to the Department for Education by 30 September 2026, with subsequent monitoring by the DfE and NHS England.

RESOLVED that:-

1. the findings of the joint Area SEND Inspection undertaken in May 2026 be noted.
2. the requirement to submit the final improvement plan to the Department for Education by 30 September 2026 be noted.
3. It be noted that progress against the improvement plan would be monitored through regular Department for Education and NHS England review meetings and reported through existing governance arrangements.

CAB/176/25 Youth Justice Plan Stockton-on-Tees 2026-2027

Consideration was given to the Youth Justice Plan 2026-27 that set out how the Council and statutory partners would prevent children entering the criminal justice system, reduce reoffending and use of custody, respond to serious youth violence and exploitation, and ensure children's voices informed services.

Performance during 2025-26 included a reduction in First Time Entrants from 33 children to 21 and a reduction in custodial sentences from five to four. The Plan also identified continuing challenges, particularly reoffending rates above regional and national averages, the complexity of a small cohort of children, serious youth violence and exploitation, school exclusions and potential reductions in external funding.

Priorities for 2026-27 therefore focused on prevention and diversion, reducing reoffending and custody, strengthening responses to violence and exploitation, early intervention and children's participation.

RESOLVED that:-

1. the contents of the Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Plan 2026-27 be noted.
2. the strategic priorities and delivery approach outlined within the Plan be endorsed.

3. continued multi-agency collaboration through the Youth Justice Management Board to deliver improved outcomes for children, families and communities, be supported
4. the implementation and monitoring arrangements contained within the Plan be approved.

CAB/177/25 Stockton-on-Tees Serious Youth Violence Strategy 2026-2031

Members considered a Strategy that established a five-year partnership approach to preventing and reducing serious youth violence affecting people aged 10-24. It had been developed in response to the Serious Violence Duty and informed by local crime and safeguarding intelligence, a Rapid Health Needs Assessment, multi-agency work and engagement with more than 100 children and young people. It adopted a public-health approach, recognising links with exploitation, poverty, adverse childhood experiences, educational exclusion, community influences and family circumstances. Its four priorities were:

- early intervention and prevention;
- deter, disrupt and divert;
- strengthening family support; and
- improving educational support.

Delivery would be supported by an annual action plan containing specific actions, milestones, responsibilities and performance measures, with strategic oversight through the Youth Justice Management Board.

RESOLVED that:-

1. the contents of the Stockton-on-Tees Serious Youth Violence Strategy 2026-2031, be noted
2. the vision, priorities and partnership approach outlined within the Strategy, be endorsed.
3. implementation of the annual Serious Youth Violence Delivery Plan be supported
4. the governance arrangements which place strategic oversight with the Youth Justice Management Board be endorsed.

CAB/178/25 Financial Update and Medium-Term Financial Plan - 2026/2027 Quarter 1

Cabinet received a Quarter 1 report that forecast a £5.807m overspend against the Council's 2026/27 revenue budget.

Significant pressures included Children's Social Care, where increased use and cost of external residential placements were contributing to a projected £2.960m overspend.

In Neighbourhood Services the new waste collection arrangements, with additional rounds and vehicle requirements, were generating pressures as was home to school transport and catering, resulting in a projected overspend of £3,128m

There continued to be significant pressure on the Dedicated Schools Grant with a forecast deficit of £15.2m for which the Council was assuming that a 10% contribution of £1.52m would be required to be funded in the current financial year.

Directorates continued to identify mitigating action while the Powering Our Futures programme continued to address the underlying medium-term budget gap.

The report also updated Cabinet on General Fund balances and the revised Capital Programme.

RESOLVED that:-

1. the update to the Medium-Term Financial Plan and the current level of General Fund balances be noted.
2. the revised Capital Programme detailed at Appendix C, be noted.

CAB/179/25 Annual Ombudsman Report

Consideration was given to a report relating to enquiries received by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in respect of the Council.

It was explained that 69 complaints and enquiries had been received concerning the Council during 2025/26 and the Ombudsman had responded to 51 of these, compared with 30 in the previous year. Seven had proceeded to detailed investigation and all seven were upheld; these concerned Adult Services, SEND and Inclusion, Children's Social Care and Community School Transport. All Ombudsman recommendations were accepted and implemented by the Council, and in three of the seven cases the Ombudsman was satisfied that the Council had already provided an appropriate remedy before investigation. The report notes that complaints training and guidance on remedies had been strengthened to maximise organisational learning.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

CAB/180/25 Procurement Plan

Consideration was given to a report that sought Cabinet approval for planned procurements above the £500,000 threshold for officer delegated authority.

Annex 1 included transportation schemes for signalisation of the Yarm Road/Darlington Back Lane junction, with an option relating to Bishopton Road West, and works at the A19/A689 interchange including a new pedestrian and cycle bridge and associated highway works. The respective contract values were stated as £4.2m and £6.5m. Both were proposed as direct awards to Balfour Beatty through the SCAPE Framework, with the report setting out the reasons for that procurement route. Contract award would not take place until the remaining funding had been secured and signed. A proposed delegations would allow the relevant Director or Assistant Director to make the final award and subsequent contract decisions within the parameters approved by Cabinet.

RESOLVED that:-

1. Approve the contracts listed in Annex 1.
2. Authority be given to the relevant Director or Assistant Director to make the specific contract award decision and any subsequent contract variation, annual inflationary uplifts (where allowed in the contract terms and conditions) and extension decision in accordance with the delegations listed in Annex 1.

CAB/181/25 Minutes of Various Bodies

Members considered a report that provided the minutes of the following:

- Tees Valley Combined Authority Cabinet held on 26 June and 31 July 2026.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings detailed in the appendices be received.