

<b>People Select Committee</b>
<b>Review of Cost of Living Response</b>
<b>Outline Scope</b>

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<b>Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?</b>	
<p>This review will contribute to all areas of the Council Plan 2023-2026 vision:</p> <p>A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm. This means the Borough will be a place where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• people live in cohesive and safe communities</li> <li>• people are supported and protected from harm</li> <li>• people live healthy lives</li> </ul> <p>A place that is clean, vibrant and attractive. This means we will enjoy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• great places to live and visit</li> <li>• clean and green spaces</li> <li>• rich cultural experiences</li> </ul> <p>A place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed. This means that the Borough will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a growing economy</li> <li>• improved education and skills development</li> <li>• job creation and increased employment</li> </ul> <p>A Council that is ambitious, effective and proud to serve. This means that we will make sure that we provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• financial sustainability and value for money</li> <li>• dedicated and resourceful employees</li> <li>• strong leadership and governance</li> </ul>	
<b>What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?</b>	
<p>The North East Child Poverty Commission has stated that almost two in five children in the North East (38 per cent) are living in poverty, rising to almost half – 47 per cent – of North East children living in a household with an under five.</p> <p>The consequences of inequalities are significant and impact on quality of life, life chances and life</p>	

expectancy. There are affluent areas alongside disadvantaged areas in the Borough. Nine of the Borough's 26 wards are in the 10% most deprived in the country and there is an average male life expectancy gap of 21 years between the most and least deprived areas.

Currently, the rising costs of food, fuel and other essentials are combined with this existing disadvantage and vulnerability with households being placed under significant pressure. In the short term, this leaves those residents at risk of hardship and poor wellbeing as well as reduced opportunities in the long term.

In response to the ongoing cost of living crisis, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) has introduced a number of initiatives (for example the Cost-of-Living on-line HUB / Warm Spaces / Food Aid Fund) to support the Borough's residents.

This review will build on the 'Scrutiny Review of the Cost of School Uniform' which was undertaken in 2020 and the recommendations of the 'Scrutiny Review of Child Poverty' undertaken in 2022.

This review would consider SBC's response to ensure the Council effectively supports the current and emerging needs of its residents, whilst also evaluating its current approach to inform/provide a steer for ongoing and future activity.

As detailed in the 13 July Cabinet report "Powering Our Futures – Delivering People, Place Economy", the Council is committed to the development of an Anti-Poverty Action Plan (to be co-developed with partners and those with lived experience). The plan will focus on how the Council can help prevent and mitigate the impact of poverty. This review will inform the development of this plan.

**The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:**

- How has Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) responded to the ongoing cost of living crisis both internally and by working with external partners and agencies?
- How has advice and support been communicated to residents and SBC staff? Can this be improved?
- How does SBC's approach compare with other Local Authorities?
- What are the main 'cost of living' issues facing residents? How have these changed over time?
- How do 'cost of living' issues vary across the Borough?
- In what ways has the cost of living crisis impacted on staff retention and recruitment?
- How have SBC staff been supported if they are struggling financially and mentally as a result of the cost of living crisis?
- What can the Council learn from the Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector?
- How will the 'Powering our Future' programme support the delivery of the Council's cost of living response?

**Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work?**

Council, Cabinet, Government, public.

**Expected duration of review and key milestones:**

9 months (reporting to Cabinet in March 2024)  
Approve scope and project plan – September 2023  
Receive evidence – October – December 2023  
Draft recommendations – January 2024  
Final report – February 2024  
Report to Cabinet – March 2024

**What information do we need?**

Existing information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc.):

His Majesty’s Government, *1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024: Household Support Fund guidance for county councils and unitary authorities in England*. Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils/1-april-2023-to-31-march-2024-household-support-fund-guidance-for-county-councils-and-unitary-authorities-in-england>

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, *Cost of Living Support webpages*. Available at:

<https://www.stockton.gov.uk/cost-of-living-hub>

Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet Member, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc.)

What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Officers

- Background information and context setting:
  - Help and support provided across the Borough
  - Staffing and HR related issues
  - Housing issues
  - A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees
  - Learning and Skills initiatives
  - Work with Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF)
  - Work with Community Partnerships
  - Future priorities and approaches

Representatives from another Council

- How have they responded to the cost of living crisis? Is there anything we can learn?

Representatives from Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) - For example Stockton-on-Tees Food Power Network, Thrive Teesside, local faith leaders)

- Examples of partnership working with SBC.
- Examples of best practice. Is there anything we can learn?

Citizens Advice Bureau and Tees Credit Union

- Examples of partnership working with SBC.
- Examples of best practice. Is there anything we can learn?

**How will this information be gathered? (eg. financial baselining and analysis, benchmarking, site visits, face-to-face questioning, telephone survey, survey)**

Committee meetings, reports, research, benchmarking, site visits (TBC), consultations (TBC).
<p><b>How will key partners and the public be involved in the review?</b></p> <p>Committee meetings, information submissions, site visits (TBC).</p>
<p><b>How will the review help the Council meet the Public Sector Equality Duty?</b></p> <p>The Equality Act 2010 protects everyone from discrimination on grounds of nine Protected Characteristics (including – but not limited to – age, gender, disability, ethnicity), and advance equality of opportunity for those with Protected Characteristics. Public bodies must have due regard to the need to encourage people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.</p>
<p><b>How will the review contribute towards the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, or the implementation of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy?</b></p> <p><u>Stockton-on-Tees Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2023:</u>  All children and families get the best start in life.  All people in Stockton-on-Tees live well and live longer.  All people in Stockton-on-Tees live in healthy places and sustainable communities.</p>
<p><b>Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:</b></p> <p>This review would consider the key components of the cost of living approach adopted by the Council at a time of increasing service demands (for both advice and support). Consequently, it would seek to explore the possibility to develop, change and, if appropriate, grow the Council's services around the cost of living work to support more residents in our borough.</p>

## Project Plan

Key Task	Details/Activities	Date	Responsibility
<b>Scoping of Review</b>	Information gathering	July 2023	Scrutiny Officer Link Officer
<b>Tri-Partite Meeting</b>	Meeting to discuss aims and objectives of review	02.08.2023	Select Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Cabinet Member(s), Director(s), Scrutiny Officer, Link Officer
<b>Agree Project Plan</b>	Scope and Project Plan agreed by Committee	04.09.2023	Select Committee
<b>Publicity of Review</b>	Determine whether Communications Plan needed	TBC	Link Officer, Scrutiny Officer
<b>Obtaining Evidence</b>		02.10.2023  06.11.2023  04.12.2023	Select Committee
<b>Members decide recommendations and findings</b>	Review summary of findings and formulate draft recommendations	08.01.2024	Select Committee
<b>Circulate Draft Report to Stakeholders</b>	Circulation of Report	TBC	Scrutiny Officer
<b>Tri-Partite Meeting</b>	Meeting to discuss findings of review and draft recommendations	TBC	Select Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Cabinet Member(s), Director(s), Scrutiny Officer, Link Officer
<b>Final Agreement of Report</b>	Approval of final report by Committee	05.02.2024	Select Committee, Cabinet Member, Director
<b>Consideration of Report by Executive Scrutiny Committee</b>	Consideration of report	05.03.2024	Executive Scrutiny Committee
<b>Report to Cabinet/Approving Body</b>	Presentation of final report with recommendations for approval to Cabinet	15.03.2024	Cabinet / Approving Body