

# COUNCIL

A meeting of Council was held on Wednesday 20 September 2023.

**Present:** The Worshipful the Mayor ( Cllr Jim Beall), Cllr Stefan Barnes, Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Michelle Bendelow, Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Diane Clarke OBE, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Dan Fagan, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Nathan Gale, Cllr Clare Gamble, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Alex Griffiths, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Paul Rowling, Cllr Susan Scott, Cllr Vanessa Sewell, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Emily Tate, Cllr Jim Taylor, Cllr Hilary Vickers, Cllr Marcus Vickers, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Alan Watson, Cllr Sally Ann Watson, Cllr Paul Weston, Cllr Katie Weston and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

**Officers:** Mike Greene (CE), Ged Morton, Judy Trainer, Peter Bell, Stuart Levin (CS), Garry Cummings (DCE&F, T&P), Reuben Kench (DoCS,E&C), Carolyn Nice (A,H&W) and Marc Cole (R&IG).

**Also in attendance:** Members of the Public.

**Apologies:** Cllr Laura Tunney.

## **COU/48/23 Welcome and Evacuation Procedure**

The Worshipful the Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the arrangements for the meeting.

## **COU/49/23 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **COU/50/23 Minutes**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meetings held on 26 July 2023.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2023 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

## **COU/51/23 Presentation of the Honorary Alderman of the Borough**

The Worshipful the Mayor conferred the title of Honorary Alderman on the following five former Councillors who have given many years' service to the Borough:-

Mohammed Javed,  
Paul Kirton,  
Jean O'Donnell,  
Maurice Perry,  
Mike Smith

The former Councillors signed the Honorary Alderman Roll and received the Alderman Medal, with a framed certificate.

### **COU/52/23 Public Question Time**

The following question was submitted by Jason Clark:-

"What date does the Council take ownership of the Globe and what will be the additional payment made to the current owners for the purchase?"

Response from the Leader of the Council (by way of written response in the absence of Jason Clark:-

"The lease for the Globe containing this information is a public document, it is available to view at Land Registry as it was a registerable lease. We have two opportunities to exercise the option to purchase, which will allow us to acquire the Globe on or around 31 March 2031 or 31 March 2056.

The purchase price is subject to a valuation. The original Globe title is £200,000, the adjoining property title which now forms part of the whole premises is an amount to be agreed or determined by an expert, but importantly disregarding the significant works and improvements in the calculation."

### **COU/53/23 SBC Overview and Scrutiny - End-of-Term Report 2019-2023**

Consideration was given to the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Overview and Scrutiny – End-of-Term Report that had been produced for the recently concluded four-year Council term (covering the period 2019-2023).

The latest statutory overview and scrutiny guidance highlighted the need to maintain a strong organisational culture, including regular engagement between the executive and scrutiny, and communication of scrutiny's role and purpose to the wider Local Authority.

The report highlighted the work of the Council's scrutiny function during the last four years and contained infographics which summarised each year's work programme in detail (these infographics acted as each year's Annual Report). Importantly, it also included examples of how the outcomes from Select Committee reviews had impacted upon future service provision.

The End-of-Term Report was considered by each Select Committee prior to the recent Local Government Elections, as well as the Council's Executive Scrutiny Committee.

It was noted that review recommendations were made at a certain point in time, and naturally as the report covered a four-year period, a number of the issues covered had since developed further.

Aside from those relating to recently completed reviews, the majority of scrutiny recommendations from this period had been subject to monitoring by Select Committees and had been signed-off as complete.

Production of the End-of-Term Report and consideration by Cabinet and Council (20 September 2023) supported the aims of the statutory guidance. Consideration of the report by Council also fulfilled the requirements of the SBC Constitution.

As previously noted, all five of the Council's Select Committees and the Executive Scrutiny Committee had considered the Overview and Scrutiny – End-of-Term Report 2019-2023 during March 2023. The report was also circulated to all SBC staff for information via the Keeping You in Touch (KYiT) weekly newsletter on 5 May 2023.

In addition, the report had been shared with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) as an example of local overview and scrutiny activity. CfGS has recently contacted the Scrutiny Team with a view to using this as a case study for other Local Authorities.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

#### **COU/54/23 Extension of Terms of Office of Independent Persons**

Consideration was given to a report that provided Council with the recommendations from the Monitoring Officer to extend the terms of office of the existing Independent Persons.

On the 29 January 2020 Council agreed to appoint Dr Stuart Green and Lyn Ryan as the Council's new Independent Persons.

The Localism Act 2011 (the 2011 Act) required the Council appoint at least one Independent Person for the purposes of its arrangements for dealing with allegations of misconduct by local authority Members.

In addition, the standing orders relating to disciplinary action against protected statutory officers (the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2015) required Councils to establish Panels which had at least two Independent Persons (appointed pursuant to the Localism Act 2011) as Members. If an Authority did not have two Independent Persons of its own, it would have to look to other Authorities for its Independent Person Panel members.

Taking all of this into account it was recommended that the appointment of Dr Stuart Green and Lyn Ryan as Independent Persons be extended to 10th May 2027 (reflecting the terms of office of elected members).

RESOLVED that the terms of office of Dr Stuart Green and Lyn Ryan as Independent Persons be extended to 10th May 2027

#### **COU/55/23 Motion - The following motion has been submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.40 by Cllr Norma Stephenson:-**

The following motion had been submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.40, moved by Councillor Norma Stephenson, seconded by Councillor Bob Cook:-

"Stockton Borough Council, as an important consumer and opinion leader, resolves, within the constraints of available resources, to work with Stockton Fairtrade Borough Partnership to research, develop, and support a strategy to facilitate the promotion and purchase of foods with the FAIRTRADE Mark as part of its commitment to sustainable development and to give marginalised producers a fair deal.

To be recognised by the residents and the business community of Stockton-on-Tees, suppliers, employees and other local authorities, as a borough that actively supports and promotes Fairtrade and to increase the sale of products with the FAIRTRADE Mark.

Stockton Borough Council resolves to contribute to the campaign to increase sales of products with the FAIRTRADE Mark by striving to maintain Fairtrade status for the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees as detailed in the Fairtrade Foundation's Fairtrade Towns Initiative.

Stockton Borough Council resolves to:-

- Continue to offer FAIRTRADE Marked food and drink options at meetings where refreshment is offered.
- Continue to promote the Fairtrade Towns initiative, for example, through articles in the council's Stockton News and KYIT.
- Seek ways to work with Stockton Fairtrade Borough Partnership to encourage local retailers to provide Fairtrade options for residents
- Seek ways to urge local business to offer Fairtrade options to their staff and promote the FAIRTRADE Mark internally
- To support Stockton Fairtrade Borough Partnership in gaining publicity for activities promoting Fairtrade in the borough as far as possible.
- Note that responsibility for progression of the Fairtrade Town initiative is within the portfolio of the Cabinet Member for Access & Communities, working alongside the Fairtrade Borough Partnership
- Support as far as possible events and publicity during national Fairtrade Fortnight - the annual national campaign to promote sales of products with the FAIRTRADE Mark."

At this point a vote took place and the motion was unanimously carried.

**COU/56/23 Motion - The following motion has been submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.40 by Cllr Niall Innes:-**

The following motion had been submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.40 by Councillor Niall Innes:-

"Following the recent Local Elections and the changes it has brought, this motion seeks to remove the current leader of the Council, Cllr Bob Cook, and elect Cllr Tony Riordan as the new leader of Stockton Borough Council at tonight's meeting. This is so that we can move forward respecting the democratic choice of the electorate in

Stockton-on-Tees, where The Conservative Group are now the largest group in the Council receiving 43% of the overall votes compared to Labours low standing of 34%.”

Councillor Niall Innes informed the meeting that he was moving a motion to withdraw his motion, this was seconded by Councillor Lynn Hall.

A vote took place and the motion to withdraw the original motion submitted by Councillor Niall Innes was not carried.

Councillor Niall Innes informed the meeting that he would not be moving his original motion.

The Worshipful the Mayor asked the meeting if any other Member would like to move the original motion that had been submitted by Councillor Niall Innes.

Moved by Councillor Paul Rowling, seconded by Councillor Eileen Johnson that the original motion submitted by Councillor Niall Innes be heard as follows:-

“Following the recent Local Elections and the changes it has brought, this motion seeks to remove the current leader of the Council, Cllr Bob Cook, and elect Cllr Tony Riordan as the new leader of Stockton Borough Council at tonight’s meeting. This is so that we can move forward respecting the democratic choice of the electorate in Stockton-on-Tees, where The Conservative Group are now the largest group in the Council receiving 43% of the overall votes compared to Labours low standing of 34%.”

Following a debate, a vote took place.

The motion was not carried.

**COU/57/23 Motion - The following motion has been submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.40 by Cllr Tony Riordan:-**

The following motion had been submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.40, moved by Councillor Tony Riordan, seconded by Councillor Niall Innes:-

“The Cabinet recently considered the Vibrant and Thriving Town Centres - Regeneration Update Report and made the decision recommending the development of a Masterplan and Business Case for the development of Teesdale Business Park, and the adjacent Marshalling Yards, based around a potential Social Care & Health Zone.

The Regeneration Report submitted to inform that decision highlights the exceptional opportunity to bring together a strategy for both sites, which could see a nationally significant regeneration scheme focused around key sector growth to develop a Health and Social Care Zone, with potential for: integrated training and health facilities, business incubation, research, and development.

The potential for these important sites should not be underestimated, and the development of a Masterplan and Business Case should, to support the initial vision for a Social Care and Health Zone, go further to include a new state of art hospital that is so desperately needed in Stockton-on-Tees.

North Tees Hospital trust has estimated that it will potentially spend up to £300 million, just to maintain the building in the 8 years of useful life it has left.

Infrastructure plays a critical role in supporting local communities and the local economy. Planning and financing it correctly to maximise the area(s) potential are the keys to success in enabling our residents to access new health care facilities, education, skills, and employment opportunities.

The nature of any proposed infrastructure project and ownership of the land/property is also important in securing investor interest. If the infrastructure project is clearly linked to a local policy or strategy, supports strategic sites, or enables significant transformation of the economy – this gives the proposition a lot more credibility. A willingness to co-invest by Stockton Borough Council signals serious commitment.

To achieve this, Stockton Borough Council resolves,

1. To invite Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen, and the expertise of the Tees Valley Combined Authority, in assisting to formulate the Masterplan and Business Case Development for the Teesdale Business Park and Marshalling Yard sites.
2. To invite external investors and developers with a proven track record of urban regeneration to participate in the preparation of the Master Plan and Business Case Development, and final development of the sites.
3. To invite North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust to work with this Council in formulating through their expertise the Masterplan and Business Case development for the Teesdale Business Park and Marshalling Yard sites.
4. To invite the local education sector, in particular the local universities to collaborate with this Council in formulating the Masterplan and Business Case Development for the Teesdale Business Park and Marshalling Yard sites.
5. To invite the Members of Parliament for Stockton South and North to promote and lobby the Government to follow up on the health care investment already made in the planned Community Diagnostic Centre in Stockton-on-Tees, by recognising further the significant savings to the public purse by investing in a new state of the art hospital on the sites, rather than spending £300 million on a hospital that has only 8 years of useful life left.”

Moved by Councillor Bob Cook, seconded by Councillor Nigel Cooke that the substantive motion be amended as follows:-

“The Cabinet recently considered the Vibrant and Thriving Town Centres - Regeneration Update Report and made the decision recommending the development of a Masterplan and Business Case for the development of Teesdale Business Park, and the adjacent Marshalling Yards, based around a potential Social Care & Health Zone.

The Regeneration Report submitted to inform that decision highlights the exceptional opportunity to bring together a strategy for both sites, which could see a nationally significant regeneration scheme focused around key sector growth to develop a Health and Social Care Zone, with potential for: integrated training and health facilities, business incubation, research, and development.

The potential for these important sites should not be underestimated, and the development of a Masterplan and Business Case in addition Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council supports the case for the building of a new state of the art acute hospital within the Borough.

North Tees Hospital trust has estimated that it will potentially spend up to £300 million, just to maintain the building in the 8 years of useful life it has left.

Infrastructure plays a critical role in supporting local communities and the local economy. Planning and financing it correctly to maximise the area(s) potential are the keys to success in enabling our residents to access new health care facilities, education, skills, and employment opportunities.

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To achieve this, Stockton Borough Council resolves,

1. To invite the Tees Valley Mayor, and the expertise of the Tees Valley Combined Authority, in assisting to formulate the Masterplan and Business Case Development for the Teesdale Business Park and Marshalling Yard sites.
2. To invite external investors and developers with a proven track record of urban regeneration to participate in the preparation of the Master Plan and Business Case Development, and final development of the sites.
3. To invite our NHS Partners to work with this Council in formulating through their expertise the Masterplan and Business Case development for the Teesdale Business Park and Marshalling Yard sites.
4. To invite the local education sector, in particular the local universities to collaborate with this Council in formulating the Masterplan and Business Case Development for the Teesdale Business Park and Marshalling Yard sites.
5. For the Leader of the Council to write the Members of Parliament for Stockton South and North and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to promote and lobby the Government to follow up on the health care investment already made in the planned Community Diagnostic Centre in Stockton-on-Tees, by recognising further the significant savings to the public purse by investing in a new state of the art hospital, in the Borough rather than spending £300 million on a hospital that has only 8 years of useful life left.”

Following a debate, a vote took place and it was agreed that the amendment be carried and therefore the amendment became the substantive motion.

No further amendments were moved so a vote then took place on the substantive motion.

The substantive motion was unanimously carried as follows:-

Moved by Councillor Bob Cook, seconded by Councillor Nigel Cooke that the substantive motion be amended as follows:-

“The Cabinet recently considered the Vibrant and Thriving Town Centres - Regeneration Update Report and made the decision recommending the development of a Masterplan and Business Case for the development of Teesdale Business Park, and the adjacent Marshalling Yards, based around a potential Social Care & Health Zone.

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4. To invite the local education sector, in particular the local universities to collaborate with this Council in formulating the Masterplan and Business Case Development for the Teesdale Business Park and Marshalling Yard sites.



5. For the Leader of the Council to write the Members of Parliament for Stockton South and North and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to promote and lobby the Government to follow up on the health care investment already made in the planned Community Diagnostic Centre in Stockton-on-Tees, by recognising further the significant savings to the public purse by investing in a new state of the art hospital, in the Borough rather than spending £300 million on a hospital that has only 8 years of useful life left.”

**COU/58/23 Motion - The following motion has been submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.40 by Cllr Tony Riordan:-**

The following motion had been submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.40, moved by Councillor Tony Riordan, seconded by Councillor Niall Innes:-

“Change to Constitution

Call-in provides a mechanism for councillors to intervene when they feel that a decision being made by the executive needs to be revisited (or possibly changed). The use of call-in can also be seen to be embarrassing and frustrating to a local authority and its leadership. However, it provides a key check and balance in the leader/cabinet system of governance – a long-stop that, in theory, prevents the overweening exercise of power by Cabinet. It should, however, be regarded as a measure that is only needed in exceptional circumstances, rather than day-to-day.

Paragraph 1.35, Council Constitution.

Decisions of Stockton Borough Council will usually be made in accordance with the following principles:

- proportionality (i.e., the action must be proportionate to the desired outcome).
- due consultation and the taking of professional advice from Officers.
- respect for human rights and equality of opportunity.
- a presumption in favour of openness.
- clarity of aims and desired outcomes; and
- an explanation of what options have been considered and giving the reasons for decisions.

This motion is aimed at improving the principles, ensuring that call-in is still used in exceptional circumstances, but not making it almost impossible, as it is at present.

There can be a perception among members that call-in can be used to reverse a decision. It is important to emphasise that this is not the case. More often the challenge is on the quality of the information provided and accessed by the decision maker to arrive at what should be a robust and evidence-based decision.

Stockton Borough resolves to amend the Constitution by inserting the following at paragraph 1.35,

- relevant matters have not been ignored,
- clarity and explanation of information provided,
- the merits of the decision,

Moved by Councillor Niall Innes, seconded by Councillor Lynn Hall that the substantive motion be amended as follows:-

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Call-in provides a mechanism for councillors to intervene when they feel that a decision being made by the executive needs to be revisited (or possibly changed). The use of call-in can also be seen to be embarrassing and frustrating to a local authority and its leadership. However, it provides a key check and balance in the leader/cabinet system of governance – a long-stop that, in theory, prevents the overweening exercise of power by Cabinet. It should, however, be regarded as a measure that is only needed in exceptional circumstances, rather than day-to-day.

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A vote took place and it was agreed that the amendment be carried and therefore the amendment became the substantive motion.

No further amendments were moved so a vote then took place on the substantive motion.

The substantive motion was carried as follows:-

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Call-in provides a mechanism for councillors to intervene when they feel that a decision being made by the executive needs to be revisited (or possibly changed). The use of call-in can also be seen to be embarrassing and frustrating to a local

authority and its leadership. However, it provides a key check and balance in the leader/cabinet system of governance – a long-stop that, in theory, prevents the overweening exercise of power by Cabinet. It should, however, be regarded as a measure that is only needed in exceptional circumstances, rather than day-to-day.

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- relevant matters have not been ignored,
- clarity and explanation of information provided,

### **COU/59/23 Members' Question Time**

The following question had been submitted by Councillor Niall Innes for response by the Cabinet Member for Access, Communities & Community Safety (Councillor Norma Stephenson OBE):-

“Can the Leader inform us what this Council is doing to tackle excessive fly-tipping in the Borough?”

The Cabinet Member for Access, Communities & Community Safety responded with:-

“Stockton Borough Council has a proactive enforcement service that takes action on environmental crime and fly tipping, a crime that can impact residents’ feelings of safety and vulnerability to crime. Fly tipping costs local authorities millions of pounds each year to remove but it also has a detrimental impact on both our community and environment, residents are encouraged to help us tackle the problem and there is an easy online reporting system, and also methods to report via housing providers.

Enforcement Officers have powers to issue fines and prosecutions against members of the public and irresponsible waste carriers who do not comply with legislation and who blight local communities with inconsiderate fly tipping. Case Management Officers

are due to embark on additional training to enhance their investigative skills and improve prosecution quality so the worst and most prolific offenders can be brought to justice. £23k Government funding has been secured in order to purchase equipment such as covert cameras, environmental measures and IT equipment to target those areas most at risk from fly tipping and now, a new initiative, named Operation Grant has begun in Port Clarence to address the issues there. The intention is to target other areas at increased risk of fly tipping in due course. Enforcement Officers patrol fly tipping hot spot areas daily, and waste accumulations are reported to colleagues in Care For Your Area, so that swift clean up action can be taken.

Enforcement and Case Management Officers regularly run Community Action Days with partners from Thirteen, CFYA Cleveland Fire Brigade and Police. The most recent was on 5th September, and community skips were used to encourage responsible waste disposal. Officers were on hand to educate and to explain to residents the hazards of dumping unsanitary and often combustible waste, the environmental and community impacts and what the likely penalties could be under legislation, fly tipping is a criminal offence and can leave you subject to a fine of an unlimited amount and imprisonment of up to 5 year.

Local residents in identified Hot Spot areas are sent letters explaining the impacts, and the consequences of fly tipping and irresponsible waste disposal. While I understand that fly tipping is a year-round problem and requires a rounded partnership approach, as we enter Autumn, Bonfire season is fast approaching, and fly tipping creates potential sources for people setting deliberate fires which creates an added strain on Emergency Services. I am confident that there is a strong partnership approach to tackle fly tipping and that Community Safety, CFYA and our partners in Cleveland Fire Brigade and the Police have plans in place to mitigate the consequences of fly tipping and waste accumulation, and that our teams are aware of the risks of combustible material being available in our communities.”

Councillor Niall Innes asked the following supplementary question:-

“Regarding the 2021/22 national enforcement fly-tipping tables that have just been released show this Council is one of the least effective at issuing fixed penalty notices locally and nationally being 205th out of 305 councils. Residents expect to see fixed penalty notices issued, given these poor results can the Cabinet Member tell us what she is doing to increase the fixed penalty notices so we can climb these league tables?”

The Cabinet Member for Access, Communities & Community Safety responded with:-

“There have been a number of actions that have been taken but I think the important one is that case managers have been given more training so that they can do better investigations and gather more evidence that can be taken and used in court.”

The following question had been submitted by Councillor Niall Innes for response by the Chair of the Planning Committee (Councillor Mick Stoker):-

“It is apparent that this Council have allowed excessive planning applications to cause havoc for the resident's borough, especially in my Ward of Hartburn. What assurances can be provided that the huge number of residents who have submitted objections to the proposed 700 houses in Wynyard will be listened to by this council?”

The Chair of the Planning Committee responded with:-

“As this is a matter for the Local Planning Authority, a written response outlining the process will be provided to explain how representations that are formally submitted to a planning application are considered before a planning application is determined. This written response will also include any response to a supplementary question.”

Councillor Niall Innes asked the following supplementary question:-

“The National Policy Framework requires authorities to have a local validation list published on their website and reviewed every two years. The local list identifies that locally determined information which is required by the authority beyond the basic national requirement information to be submitted with an application and together they provide basis to validate an application. Local lists typically require assessments of new open spaces, landscape and visual impacts, transport and travel and air quality to name a few. Stockton Council doesn't have a visible or active list at this time and one hasn't been seen since around 2013. In a recent press release from the application stated that the submitted information with the application for Wynyard met with national requirements for validation and was therefore considered to be valid, this is all despite we don't have an active local list. I therefore wish to ask when, why and on what authority was the local list removed from the Council website and where doesn't that leave the Council in terms of a local validation list?”

The Legal Adviser informed the meeting that Members at Council meetings can not discuss specific applications that are being made and are being considered by officers under delegated powers or by the Planning Committee.

The Chair of the Planning Committee also added:-

“I believe what Councillor Innes is looking for is the LDF.”

The following question had been submitted by Councillor Stefan Houghton for response by the Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport (Councillor Clare Gamble):-

“At the Special Council on 22nd February 2023, I raised objections to the proposal in the MTFP to introduce car parking charges at Preston Park. Matters of concern included parking being displaced to the surrounding residential areas and the risk of pricing visitors away from Preston Park.

Since the 22nd February, significant events such as holding our local elections and submitting a planning application for elements of Preston Parks redevelopment have taken place. As the Special Council was seven months ago, I would appreciate an update on the council's latest thoughts towards introducing parking charges?”

The Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport responded with:-

“The potential introduction of car parking charges at Preston Park is still being considered in line with the capital works programme which is due to be completed in 2025. The re-development work includes plans to increase overall car parking spaces by re-design the main car park and also extending the south of the car park. As

indicated previously the Council will explore a range of different charging options including permits to frequent visitors. But as I have mentioned it is not expected to be completed until 2025.”

The following question had been submitted by Councillor Ray Godwin for response by the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Cook):-

“As we all know Birmingham city council recently issued a section 114 notice, Conservative media has since blamed an ineffective Labour administration for this failing, but Birmingham is not alone, and these financial pressures are not isolated to any political persuasion.

Northamptonshire County Council was the first to declare bankruptcy in over two decades. The Conservative-run authority had long prided itself on leading the way in privatisation, low-council tax and resident value for money. But its high-risk strategies of outsourcing social care services and selling off public buildings backfired.

Thurrock, on the Thames Estuary in Essex, filed a section 114 in December 2022 after declaring a £469m black hole in its finances. Concerns had been raised as far back as 2018 over the Conservative-run authority's alleged "extreme" appetite for financial risk.

The latest authorities which have warned that they face issuing a section 114 notice in the near future include Kent, Guildford, Hastings, Southampton and Bradford. This is as a result of the dire financial situation that they currently face and is seen as the tip of the iceberg.

Looking at the wider picture of local authorities' accounts for 2022/23, it would seem these councils are not alone, and as the year unfolds it will not be surprising if more authorities warn that they are also at risk.

The spate of warnings of trouble ahead follows on from the high-profile financial failure of Woking Borough Council, which was put under government intervention in May and issued an s114 in June. This was an issuance which many people have argued will have ramifications for the whole of the local government sector.

To give further insight into Woking Borough Council:

The Liberal Democrats took over Woking from the Conservatives at this year's local elections. With most debts racked up under the previous Conservative administration with failings blamed on various questionable investments - including a 23-story Hilton hotel.

Taking all of the above into account My Question to the leader of the council is:

“What is the latest financial forecast within SBC and what is putting the biggest pressures on our financial resources?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“I am sure everyone has seen the recent press and there are now many Councils in financial difficulty, not just those Councillor Godwin has referred to in the question. Some have had to issue a section 114 notice and others have indicated that they are heading towards that position. As well as significant historic funding reductions, local

authorities are now facing huge financial pressures caused by inflation and increasing demands.

The Government have deferred various reviews of Local Government Finance – the most recent being the Fair Funding review which has been around now for over 5 years and not progressed. I have called many times for a long-term funding settlement which is fair and which would enable Councils to provide essential services for our Communities.

We at Stockton have managed our finances well, made difficult decisions and made huge savings in the past but we are also under pressure. The latest update report to Cabinet is showing a projected shortfall of £3.7m – caused by inflation and demand pressures particularly costs of supporting our vulnerable children. Whilst we can use reserves this is not sustainable and that is why we are commencing with the transformation programme. What we really need though is a fundamental review into the financing of Local Government.”

Councillor Ray Godwin asked the following supplementary question:-

“Are there any actions the Council is taking to alleviate the situation?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“In the MTFP we put in a programme of transformation of our services that look at efficiencies and savings to make sure we can still deliver services. We have been a financially well-managed Council so we can use the two years going forward to 2024/25 when the projected deficit will kick in we can use the reserves and this gives us a bit of breathing room to look at the transformation process. A lot of Councils don't have that breathing space and are in dire straits already.”

The following question had been submitted by Councillor Ray Godwin for response by the Leader of Council (Councillor Bob Cook):-

“With well over a decade of Austerity and public service cuts and services remaining well short of when the present government took power in 2010, along with inflationary pressures and energy rises, it is not difficult to see why so many councils are in dire financial trouble.

As we know this is not helped by shifting funding responsibilities for many services from National government to local councils, (The taxpayer to rate payer burden).

Please can the leader of the council tell me funding difference from national government from 2010 to present day?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

““The amount of funding allocated by central government in 23/24 is £36m less than in 2010, or a £97m reduction when you take inflation into account. This is a 25% cash reduction or 47% real terms reduction.”

Councillor Ray Godwin asked the following supplementary question:-

“So when my residents tell me that this Council should not have increased council tax to maintain services, can I assure them that under the present government funding policy not raising council tax was not a viable option to maintain frontline services?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“Northampton who kept their council tax as low as what they could are now bankrupt and other Councils who did the same are struggling. What Stockton are trying to do is ensure that the services we are delivering are deliverable with the money that we get through from council tax. If we didn't raise it and many times the Conservative Group told us not to raise it we would be in the same position as a lot of other councils in the country. We have got that breathing space to try and reduce that deficit going forward and one of the reasons why we can do this is because we have been able to take notice of what the government has said our spending power is and as I have said in many budget meeting we don't want to raise council tax but the way that government have reduced our money to run our services has reduced over the years, its been difficult not having to raise council tax. So, you can say to your residents that unfortunately because of the amount of money government has taken off local councils it is unfortunate that councils do have to raise their council tax. This is the way this government works, it takes it of them and puts it on local councillors to make these awful decisions to raise council tax even in the cost of living crisis.”

The following question had been submitted by Councillor Shakeel Hussain for response by the Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport (Councillor Clare Gamble):-

“The residents of Richmond Road are blighted with people parking their cars in the road without consideration. On occasions residents have been unable to leave their homes due to vehicles parked across driveways despite having white lines to stop people doing so.

As much as we want people to use and enjoy the jewel of Stockton Ropner Park the parking issue is causing misery for local residents. What will this Labour council do to help the residents of Richmond Road?”

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport responded with:-

“Thank you, Councillor Hussain, for bringing this issue to my attention and to the residents who have come along to this meeting and waited so patiently.

I spoke to council officers about this issue earlier today and council officers will be in-touch with yourself and Councillor Mubeen to get more detail about exactly what the issue is, including exact locations, specific times so we can look at what we can do to resolve the issue and to also get some of our civic enforcement team down there for you as well.

Can I also say that please, all members forward-based issues like this please don't wait until a Council meeting to ask a question, my virtual door is always open, drop me an email, get in-touch with council officers, we are all here to help residents across the Borough. So please just reach out and hopefully we can get issues resolved a bit quicker.”



To better understand the extent of issues currently being experienced by residents, including exact locations and specific timings, Officers will liaise with Ward Councillors and request colleagues in our Civic Enforcement Team undertake proactive monitoring to address the concerns raised.”

The following question had been submitted by Councillor Shakeel Hussain for response by the Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety (Councillor Norma Stephenson):-

“The residents of Yarm Road have had to put up with sex workers on their doorsteps for the last 15 or so years. The residents have had enough so what will this labour council do to help the residents rid the area of sex workers who operate day and night. Even during school times?”

The Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety responded with:-

“Addressing concerns about sex workers operating in our community requires a thoughtful and comprehensive approach that considers both the safety and well-being of the residents as well as the rights and needs of sex workers. It's essential to approach this issue with sensitivity and empathy while working towards a solution that benefits everyone involved.

I understand that some residents in our community have raised concerns about the presence of sex workers in our neighbourhood. This is a complex issue that requires careful consideration, and it's important that we address it in a way that respects the rights and dignity of all individuals involved whilst also adopting the national frameworks in place in addressing sex work in our communities.

Recent work within the ward has included an increase in uniformed patrols, improved street lighting and additional CCTV cameras. More work is also planned in the coming weeks and months as the area has been selected as part of Cleveland Polices new Clear, Hold, Build strategy. We also have an open dialogue with Cleveland Police around problem solving and we are contributing across the authority in addressing any illegal activities that may be associated with sex work. We are currently awaiting news of additional funding from central government which will allow increased intervention with sex workers, delivered through local charities and intervention specialists.

At the same time, it's important to recognise that sex work is a complex and multifaceted issue. Many individuals engage in sex work due to economic hardship, addiction, or other circumstances that lead them to become victims of sexual abuse, control and organised criminals. The protection of those engaged in street sex work is very much a priority for the multi-agency sexual exploitation group. To address the underlying causes that contribute to women being forced into sex work, we have a range of support services such as addiction counselling, mental health services, and job training programs. These services can provide an opportunity for sex workers to transition out of the activity if they choose to do so.

Furthermore, along with other partners we are exploring harm reduction strategies that aim to minimise the risks associated with sex work. This includes addressing the health needs of those engaged in sex work whilst also ensuring services are in place to break the cycle of exploitation in a way that workers can access on their terms.

Finally, we recognise that it's essential to engage in a community dialogue that includes all stakeholders, including sex workers themselves who are also members of that local community. Their input is crucial in finding solutions that are fair and effective.

In summary, addressing concerns about sex workers in our community requires a multifaceted approach that prioritises the safety of residents, offers support and alternatives to sex workers, and involves all stakeholders in the discussion. By working together, we can find solutions that respect the rights and dignity of everyone in our community and we are committed to continuing this work with elected Members for the Ropner Ward.

I would also back Councillor Gamble's comments that I am approachable, and I will speak to any Councillor about any issues that they have that come under my portfolio.

Councillor Shakeel Hussain asked the following supplementary question:-

"The residents have had to put up with this a long time and some of these residents have lived on these streets for 30 plus years. How many members here would like to see sex workers outside your door? the families have safety concerns. We understand as a Council that the sex workers have issues so something needs to be done about that, it has been 15 plus years and nothing has been done."

The Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety responded with:-

"There are government guidelines around sex workers that we have to work with and we will."

The following question has been submitted by Councillor Sufi Mubeen for response by the Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport (Councillor Clare Gamble):-

"The buses stopped operating on Bowesfield Lane many years ago can the Leader please tell us if the buses will run again from Bowesfield Lane?"

The Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport responded with:-

"Bus services do sit under the remit of the TVCA as opposed to Stockton Council. However, we do work closely with them and the Council are not aware of any proposals from bus operators to serve Bowesfield Lane."

Councillor Sufi Mubeen asked the following supplementary question:-

"If the buses will not be running again please can I request the removal of the bus restrictions as this will help with the traffic calming in the area and the people who currently use this small road as a race track that has implications on the local community. Bus shelters have been removed already from Fairfield Road to Dunedin Avenue so we know that this is doable."

The Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport responded with:-

“I will speak to council officers about this and come back to you with the options that are available.”

## **COU/60/23 Forward Plan and Leader’s Statement**

The Leader of the Council gave his Forward Plan and Leaders Statement.

Council last met on the 26 July 2024. The Leader of the Council hoped Members had had a good summer break. Cabinet met on 18 September 2024 and considered the following matters:

- A Financial Update and Medium-Term Financial Plan (Quarter 1 2023/2024) report .
- The chair of executive scrutiny presented the Overview and Scrutiny - End-of-Term Report 2019-2023
- The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman - Local Authority Report for Stockton-on-Tees for 2022/23
- Appointment to an Outside Body - Teesside International Airport Board limited
- Local authority governor Appointments
- Early Years Childcare Sufficiency Assessment

Cabinet would meet on the 12 October and then the 16 November before Council met again. October Cabinet was scheduled to consider:

- Update on the Care and Health Zone
- Customer Service Excellence Compliance
- Tees Valley Music Hub
- School Performance 2022-23
- Selective Licensing of Private Rented Housing
- Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Licensing Interim Policy Review 2023
- Council Plan Update

After that the Leader of the Council looked forward to seeing Members at the next full Council meeting on the 22 November 2024.

The Leader of the Council reminded Members of the Festival of Thrift taking place in Billingham. There was also libraries week taking place from Monday 2nd October, a chance to experience the Borough’s great libraries. There would also be remembrance events across the Borough on Remembrance Sunday.