

COUNCIL

A meeting of Council was held on Wednesday 22 November 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 Richard Eglington, Cllr Lisa Evans, 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 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 Laura Tunney, Cllr Hilary Vickers, Cllr Marcus Vickers, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Paul Weston, Cllr Katie Weston and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

Officers: Mike Greene (CE), Ged Morton, Julie Butcher, Judy Trainer, Peter Bell, Stuart Levin (CS), Garry Cummings (DCE&F,T&P), Reuben Kench (DoCS,E&C), Carolyn Nice (Director of Adults, Health & Wellbeing) and Marc Cole (R&IG).

Also in attendance: Members of the Public.

Apologies: Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Dan Fagan, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Jim Taylor, Cllr Alan Watson and Cllr Sally Ann Watson.

COU/61/23 Welcome

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

COU/62/23 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Sufi Mubeen declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of agenda item 8 - Private Hire & Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy Interim Review. Councillor Sufi Mubeen withdrew from the meeting and left the room during consideration of the item.

Cllr David Reynard declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of agenda item 8 - Private Hire & Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy Interim Review. Councillor David Reynard withdrew from the meeting and left the room during consideration of the item.

Cllr Clare Gamble declared a non-registerable interest in respect of agenda item 8 - Private Hire & Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy Interim Review. Councillor Clare Gamble withdrew from the meeting and left the room during consideration of the item.

COU/63/23 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meetings held on 20 September 2023.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2023 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

COU/64/23 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:-

1. Ken Dixon,
2. Bill Woodhead MBE,

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

COU/65/23 Social Worker of the Year Awards 2023

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council had won a national award at the Social Worker of the Year Awards.

The Council won the Gold Award in the 'Supportive Social Work Employer' category which highlighted excellent employer practice in supporting, leading and championing its social work employees.

When asked why social workers love working for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, they said they felt valued and supported whilst being given the opportunity to progress through their careers at the appropriate pace, with necessary peer support. Angela Connor and Joanne Adams were at the meeting and were presented with the award by the Worship the Mayor.

Two Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council social workers were also nominated for individual award nominations namely Kim Cleaver (Mental Health Social Worker of the Year) and Amy Ibbotson (Student Social Worker of the Year).

The Worshipful the Mayor congratulated all the people involved and thanked all the social workers for their commitment and continued hard work.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bob Cook and the Cabinet Member for Adults Social Care, Councillor Ann McCoy also congratulated all those involved in the awards.

COU/66/23 Public Question Time

The Head of Legal Services informed the meeting there were no public questions.

COU/67/23 Private Hire & Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy Interim Review

Consideration was given to a report Private Hire & Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy Interim Review.

Council considered the views and comments received from the General Licensing Committee, transport trade and other interested parties following consultation on the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy and to make recommendations to Council.

The current private hire & hackney carriage licensing policy was approved in 2022 following a full public consultation.

In November 2022 following requests from the trade the transport policy was reviewed. The changes were approved and the requirements on new hackney carriage vehicle specification was relaxed. Since this policy change the hackney carriage vehicle fleet had increased by 35 vehicles, hackney carriage wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) have increased by 2.

The licensed trade made a request for the policy to be reviewed again and for this policy change to be reversed. A 21-day public consultation was undertaken giving stakeholders opportunity to comment.

The public consultation survey was available online and links were directly sent to all licensees, members and interested parties.

There were 105 responses to the consultation. In summary the proposed policy wording was supported. Details of the responses was included with the report.

The proposed policy wording is below and would mean any applications for new hackney carriage vehicles would need to be wheelchair accessible, existing hackney carriage vehicles would still be able to be replaced like for like.

Current Wording

Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAV)

WAV's that are currently licensed may be replaced with a like for like vehicle e.g. another WAV that complies with current policy.

Departure from policy in exceptional circumstances e.g. medical grounds will be considered on a case by case basis.

The hackney carriage and private hire trade will continue to be encouraged to licence a proportion of their fleet as Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles.

Proposed Wording

All new applications for hackney carriage vehicle licences are required to be wheelchair accessible vehicles.

Hackney carriage vehicles which are currently licensed may be replaced with a like for like vehicle e.g.

- WAVs can be replaced with another WAV which complies with current Policy.

- Saloons (5 seats) may be replaced with another Saloon which complies with current Policy
- MPVs (more than 5 seats) can be replaced with another MPV which complies with current Policy

The private hire trade will continue to be encouraged to licence a proportion of their fleet as Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles.

The Licensing Service continue to explore ways to increase the WAV fleet, this is a national issue, these vehicles cost more to purchase, run and maintain and drivers cannot charge more for WAV journeys under disability legislation.

A full review of the policy was expected later 2023 or early 2024, after the publication of the Department for Transport's Best Practice Guidance document, which was consulted on in 2022 and was expected in Spring 2023.

This matter was considered by the General Licensing Committee on 8 August 2023 the committee recommended the proposed changes be considered by Cabinet and Council.

If revised, the trade would be informed of the new policy via email and via private hire operators and the SHCDA. Changes would also be publicised on the trade Facebook page and via the Council website. In addition, the policy changes would be added to future trade meeting agendas.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The content of the report be noted.
2. The proposed change to the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy be approved with an implementation date of 1 December 2023

COU/68/23 Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2023

Consideration was given to a report that set out the proposed changes for polling districts and places taking into account the submission of the Acting Returning Officer and feedback received from the consultation. The consultation ended on 29 October 2023.

Each Local Authority was required to carry out reviews of Polling Districts and Polling Places in its area.

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 changed the timing of these reviews and reviews must be held within a 16-month period starting on 1 October every fifth year after 1 October 2013. Ward boundaries were unaffected by the review.

The Council's last statutory review was carried out in 2018 and an interim review was held in 2022 when a number of changes were made as a result of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England Ward Boundary Review. The changes approved by Council on 23 November 2022 were implemented and in place for the May 2023 local elections held in the Borough.

A Council's area was divided into polling districts with one or more districts making up a ward, with a polling place being the area or building within a polling district in which a polling station is situated. The Council must identify the polling districts and polling places within the Borough. The (Acting) Returning Officer is responsible for identifying the polling stations within the polling place.

The Electoral Commission Guidance was detailed within the report.

Polling districts changes had been considered to include existing and future Parliamentary boundaries. This would be achieved by merging into appropriate adjoining polling districts as identified in the 2022 review and keeping some small polling districts that due to the geography of the Parliamentary Boundary were unsuitable to combine with neighbouring polling districts. The review considerations were outlined within the report.

During the 2023 Elections, the opportunity was taken to complete the Electoral Commission's evaluation templates in order to assess the suitability/ accessibility of the polling place/ station. Presiding Officers were also asked to record any complaints/comments received.

The Boundary Commission had undertaken electorate projections as part of the Parliamentary Boundary Review 2023 and the Local Government Ward Boundary Review 2022. The recommendations take into consideration these predictions as well as the increase in postal voters that we have seen since 2021.

The Returning Officer's submission summarised the existing arrangements, key issues identified from the 2023 Elections, any notable projected changes in electorate and makes proposals for changes to polling districts / places.

Mobile polling stations continued to be used where no alternative venues could be found. Mobile stations were expensive and unpopular with voters and suggestions for alternative venues were always welcomed. The use of some schools as polling stations continued to be a problem when the safeguarding of children cannot in the view of the schools be assured, and in these circumstances alternative venues had been identified. The proposals considered Electoral Commission Guidance that the number of electors allocated to a particular polling station should not exceed 2,250 and also the introduction of Voter Identification which was more resource intensive on polling day.

Any further feedback and comments from the 2024 Elections in relation to the suitability of existing polling stations would be considered in the planning for future electoral events and statutory reviews.

The consultation was published on 1 October 2023 with a closing date for comments of midnight on 29 October 2023. The Acting Returning Officers submission summarised the existing arrangements and their proposals to reduce the number of polling districts by 8, by merging a number of polling places that use the same polling place and keeping 5 smaller polling districts due to the changes in Parliamentary Boundaries.

RESOLVED that the changes to Polling Districts and Polling Places, as outlined in the Acting Returning Officers recommendations, incorporating the responses to the comments laid out in the table within the report be approved.

COU/69/23 Director of Public Health Annual Report

Consideration was given to a report on the Director of Public Health Annual Report.

Under the Health and Social Care Act (2012), the Director of Public Health had a duty to prepare an independent annual report. As across local authorities nationally, there was a hiatus in producing these reports due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequently due to the recovery work to stand back up core public health duties and services and catch-up key work which had been achieved.

The Director of Public Health Annual Report 2022 aimed to capture an overview of key activity from a public health perspective, over the course of the unique and challenges events of the Covid-19 pandemic. It also sought to summarise the learning from this period from a public health perspective and describe some of the activity since, in response to this learning.

Recovery across the health and wellbeing system and society continued and learning would continue to be embedded in the approach of public health going forward, working with partners.

The report described some of the key work undertaken with partners and communities during the course of the pandemic and the actions since. Working alongside communities and Elected Members was an essential part of the local public health response.

Embedding learning and monitoring of public health activity would continue to be overseen and reported through the Lead Member, Corporate Management Team and Health and Wellbeing Board as part of core business.

RESOLVED that the Director of Public Health Annual Report be received

COU/70/23 Appointments

Consideration was given to a report that presented amendments to Committee in-line with the wishes of political groups and nominations to outside bodies.

RESOLVED that the following changes and appointments be approved:-

Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee – Remove Cllr Kevin Faulks and add Cllr Ray Godwin

Children and Young People Select Committee - Remove Cllr Nathan Gale and add Cllr Paul Rowling

Crime and Disorder Select Committee - Remove Cllr Sally Ann Watson and add Cllr Shakeel Hussain

Place Select Committee - Remove Cllr Alan Watson and Cllr Ray Godwin and add Cllr Shakeel Hussain and Cllr Sylvia Walmsley

River Tees Port Health Authority - Remove Councillor Alex Griffiths and add Cllr Shakeel Hussain

Standing Advisory Council of Religious Education – Add Councillor Sufi Mubeen

Tees Port Welfare Committee – Add Councillor Tony Riordan

COU/71/23 Motion

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

“The Cabinet and Senior Leadership of this Council have recently sought to introduce a new ‘Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth’ without consulting the full Council.

Despite the exercise undertaken last year in which this council provided ‘Golden Goodbyes’ and reduced Director positions while increasing salaries, it has now been decided that a further Management position is required at an estimated cost of over £120,000 per year to the Taxpayers of Stockton.

Rather than continue to spend residents' money on yet another Director, this motion urges the Cabinet to think again and to ensure that the money is used for public good and suggest that it be used to employ more enforcement officers/street wardens and create a ‘Community Safety Hub’ in Ingleby Barwick.

The salary set aside for this single director could be used to recruit as many as three civic enforcement officers / street wardens and space could be set aside in property already owned by this authority to host a community security hub, providing a base from which enforcement officers and the police could operate.

This motion seeks to ensure that resident's money is being used on initiatives that deliver for them, and keep our communities safe, not create more bureaucracy and more waste!”

The Worship the Mayor informed the meeting that as the subject matter of the motion came within the terms of reference of the Cabinet, the motion would be referred automatically, without debate or vote, to Cabinet for their consideration.

COU/72/23 Motion

The following motion had been submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.40, moved by Councillor Paul Rowling, seconded by Councillor Lisa Evans:-

“This motion proposes to amend the Procedure Rule “Appointment and Removal of the Leader of the Council” currently found in Part 3 of the Constitution of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. The addition is in bold.

APPOINTMENT AND REMOVAL OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Council may at any meeting of Full Council remove the leader by passing a resolution in accordance with the Council's Procedure Rules. The removal will take effect immediately on the passing of the resolution. Where the Council has resolved to remove the leader, a new leader is to be elected either at the same meeting or at a subsequent meeting. When a motion to remove the leader of the Council has been

discussed by a meeting of the Full Council, no other motion, which is the same or similar can be considered again within a twelve-month period, unless the notice of motion has been signed by at least half the membership of the Council and delivered to the Proper Officer in writing at least ten clear days before the date of the meeting at which it is to be addressed.”

Members debated the motion.

At this point and in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.65 Councillor Niall Innes requested that a recorded vote be taken; which was supported by at least a quarter of the members present:-

Members in favour of the motion:-

Cllr Stefan Barnes, Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Michelle Bendelow, Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Nathan Gale, Cllr Clare Gamble, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr Paul Rowling, Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Paul Weston, Cllr Katie Weston and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

Members against the motion:-

Cllr Diane Clarke OBE, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Jason French, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Alex Griffiths, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Sufi Mubeen,

Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Susan Scott, Cllr Vanessa Sewell, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Emily Tate, Cllr Laura Tunney, Cllr Hilary Vickers and Cllr Marcus Vickers.

The motion was carried by 28 votes for to 21 votes against.

COU/73/23 Members' Question Time

The Worshipful the Mayor informed the meeting that Councillor Marcus Vickers had withdrawn his below question:-

“The last 3 editions of the Councils “Stockton News” publication have included the same copy and paste information regarding Billingham. For absolute clarity to our residents in the Borough, particularly Billingham, can the leader of the Council please confirm that during round 2 of the Government’s Levelling Up Funds, made available in April 2022, this Council followed the application guidance and eligibility criteria?”

The following question had submitted by Cllr Marcus Vickers for response by the Leader of the Council (Cllr Bob Cook):-

“I welcome all opportunities to work collaboratively and effectively with all partners and neighbours to ensure a greater quality, efficient and productive service to tax paying residents of Billingham and Stockton. To ensure Stockton Borough Council taxpayers money is spent only on our residents, will the Council Leader confirm that no conversations have taken place with other Local Authorities with a view to merging,

and assure our residents that any proposal to merge in the future would be given short shrift?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“Thank you, Councillor Vickers, for your question and for highlighting the value of collaborative work, a principle that resonates strongly with our 'Powering Our Future' initiative. This new endeavour is a testament to our commitment to forward-thinking strategies for the benefit of our community.

Regarding your query about merging councils, I can confirm that no discussions have been held by me with fellow council leaders about merging our council with other local authorities. Our focus remains on strengthening our services through existing and new collaborations, always with the best interests of our residents in mind.

We value the success of long-standing initiatives like Adoption Tees Valley and our partnership with Darlington, Xentrall. These projects exemplify our dedication to effective and efficient service delivery through cooperation. The Tees Valley combined authority is another example of how collaborative efforts can significantly enhance our ability to serve our community.

While we remain open to exploring all potential avenues for improvement, our current priority is the successful implementation and development of the 'Powering Our Future' initiative, alongside our ongoing collaborative ways of working. As always, any significant changes in our council's structure will be considered carefully, keeping in line with central government guidelines and our commitment to serving the residents of our Borough.”

Councillor Marcus Vickers asked the following supplementary question:-

“Will any future merger plans be considered by full Council together with full public consultation?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:

“I have been through one re-organisation of the Council in the 1990s and whenever Councils are going to merge or change it is a directive that comes from central government. There was a full consultation with the public and I can't see any reason why the same wouldn't apply. It is something that effects everybody, this Council and/or another council.”

The following question was submitted by Cllr Niall Innes for response by the Leader of the Council (Cllr Bob Cook):-

“Can the Leader of the Council inform us the Total Amount it has cost the residents of this Borough to send Councillors / Cabinet Members to awards ceremonies for 2022 and 2023?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“In these challenging times for local government, awards ceremonies are not just social events. They're a platform to highlight the essential work we do for our communities. Our attendance at these ceremonies goes beyond recognition. It's about

learning from and engaging with other councils, showcasing our leadership, and celebrating our achievements, which too often go unnoticed.

Being nominated for these awards reflects all our collective hard work and dedication. It's an affirmation of our long-term vision for our borough and our commitment to never stop improving.

We must also consider the broader context. Attracting and retaining skilled staff in local government is increasingly difficult. By participating in these events, we demonstrate that a career in local government, and particularly with this Council, is both valuable and rewarding.

Regarding costs, we maintain transparency. The expenses for members' attendance at awards, conferences, and other functions are recorded as part of our Members' Allowances records. Full Council agreed a motion on that. The figures for the 2022-2023 financial year are already available on our website. As for the ongoing 2023-2024 year, the consolidation of this data is still in progress as the financial year had not yet ended.

Attending these ceremonies is about more than awards; it's about supporting and being part of the broader local government community and showing our commitment to our staff and the sector as a whole.”

Councillor Niall Innes asked the following supplementary question:-

“Given the cost could the Leader of the Council tell us how this is value for money for the residents to send Cabinet members who maybe here today gone tomorrow to award ceremonies when it is actually the officers who put the work in to win the awards?

The Leader of the Council responded with:

“It is about the reputation of the Council and the policies that we have in place as an Executive as a manifesto and we work together with officers. I'm sure if you as a Conservative group ever get elected as executive members you will be working with officers on your manifesto. I so far haven't seen any manifesto from the Conservative group. The Labour Group manifesto is to protect the most vulnerable and that Council services are maintained. We ensure that all of our officers can go forward with the polices. Some awards are for all the Council as we have seen tonight. It was appropriate that two Cabinet members went to the Belfast for the APSE Awards where we were nominated for Council of the year. It would have been remiss of me not to support the officers who had been involved.”

COU/74/23 Forward Plan and Leader's Statement

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

Council last met on 20 September. Since then Cabinet met and considered the following matters:

- An update on the Council Plan
- Care and Health Innovation Zone

- Selective Licensing of Private Rented Accommodation
- School Performance 2022-23
- Customer Service Excellence Compliance Assessment
- Private Hire & Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy Interim Review
- Polling Districts and Polling Places 2023
- Major Incident Plan 2023-2026
- The Director of Public Health, Annual Report
- Winter Planning

A highlight of the Leader of the Council's week had been the announcement regarding the Levelling Up Fund. The Leader of the Council was thrilled that Billingham had been awarded £20 million from this fund. This was a fantastic achievement and a testament to the collective efforts. This substantial investment was not just financial; it represented a belief in the vision and the Council's unwavering commitment to Billingham.

Looking forward, the Cabinet was scheduled to meet on 14 December and then on 18 January. Some of the topics from the forward plan included:

- 0 to 19 Childrens Public Health Programme
- Financial Update and Medium-Term Financial Plan (2023/24 Quarter 2)
- 2023 Events Summary and 2024 Memorial Calendar
- Learning and Skills Service Governing Body annual report
- Draft Attendance Strategy
- Corporate Parenting Strategy

The next full Council meeting would be on the 24 January. Until then, the Leader of the Council wished everyone all the very best for the upcoming festive season. The Leader of the Council reminded Members of Stockton Sparkles event. The High Street would transform into a winter wonderland.

The Mayor closed the meeting with seasonal best wishes to Council Members and Officers.