

COUNCIL

A meeting of Council was held on Wednesday 24 January 2024.

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 Eglinton, Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Nathan Gale, Cllr Clare Gamble, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Alex Griffiths, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Ross Patterson, 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 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), Garry Cummings (DCE&F,T&P), Reuben Kench (DoCS,E&C), Leanne Maloney-Kelly, Carolyn Nice (A,H&W), Peter Bell, Julie Butcher, John Devine, Ged Morton, Judy Trainer (DoCS) and Iain Robinson (R&IG).

Also in attendance: Members of the Public.

Apologies: Cllr Dan Fagan, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Mick Moore and Cllr David Reynard.

COU/75/23 Welcome

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

COU/76/23 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

COU/77/23 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meetings held on 22 November 2023.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2023 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

COU/78/23 Public Question Time

Public Question submitted by Mr John McDermottroe for response by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Housing (Cllr Nigel Cooke):-

“On 22 November 2022 Cllr Nigel Cooke stated that "they were ready to deliver on the bid" however the centre once again has been sold to another private investment Co. Why was this allowed to happen and what will now happen to the £20M levelling up money? And the £10M pledged by SBC?”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Housing responded with:-

“Money allocated to Billingham remains available in line with the approval at Cabinet in February 2021.

The Levelling Up Fund (LUF) bid was based on the principle of the council acquiring Billingham Town Centre and the utilisation of LUF funds to fund redevelopment. Over the last 18 months, the Council has been unable to reach agreement on acquisition with the then owners of centre St Modwen and in the absence of Levelling Up Funding at the time, needed to reassess options for redevelopment of the centre. This position was acknowledged by Cabinet in July 2023 along with approval for the production of a masterplan for Billingham town centre which is nearing completion and will be shared in early March.

Levelling Up Funds are now available and despite the Council's attempts to secure ownership, the centre has been acquired from St Modwen. The Council has had positive dialogue with the new owners and there is a commitment from both parties to work together on how best to bring about redevelopment of Billingham town centre utilising LUF money.”

Mr John McDermottroe asked the following supplementary question:-

“Is it really appropriate to use tax-payers money for the benefit of a private investment company?”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

“There is no talk of handing money over to a private investment company. It is our intention to work with the current owners of the town centre in order to maximise the investment for the benefit of the people of Billingham. As I have said positive dialog has already commenced with the new owners of Billingham town centre.”

COU/79/23 Local Plan Five Year Review

Consideration was given to a report on the Local Plan Five Year Review.

The development plan (a local plan) was at the heart of the planning system, setting out a vision and strategy for future development of the Borough. Included within it were a series of policies which supported the delivery of that strategy and against which planning applications were assessed.

Under regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, there was a legal requirement to ‘review’ local plans at least once every 5 years from their adoption to ensure they remained fit for purpose. In the case of the Stockton-on-Tees Local Plan that is required to be complete by the 31 January 2024.

At its meeting held on 18 January 2024 Cabinet RESOLVED that:-

1. The findings and recommendations of the internal officer review of the Stockton on Tees Local Plan (Appendix 1 of the report) be agreed.
2. The findings of the Local Plan review are made publicly available and published on its website.

Council RESOLVED that:-

3. A full update of the Stockton on Tees Local Plan commences.
4. The Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth be authorised to commence work on preparatory work for a new local plan with a review of the evidence base, related project management activity and consultation on updated Conservation Area Appraisals in advance of the details on government's new local plan process.

COU/80/23 Consent Street Trading Policy Review 2024

Consideration was given to a report on Consent Street Trading Policy Review 2024

The report informed Cabinet of the results of a public consultation, a draft consent street trading policy and the proposal to designate the whole borough a consent area for the purposes of street trading.

“Street Trading” was defined in paragraph 1 of Schedule 4 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 (LG(MP) Act 1982) – as “the selling or exposing or offering for sale of any article (including a living thing) in a street”. For the purposes of the Act this would include private land that the public has access to without payment.

Under the provisions of Schedule 4, a Local Authority may designate streets within its borough as either:

- Prohibited Streets - in which street trading is not allowed.
- Licence Streets - in which a licence to trade is required.
- Consent Streets - where prior consent requirements operate.

In 1987, the resolution to adopt Schedule 4 of the LG(MP) Act 1982 was taken, members approved a list of consent streets and prohibited streets, in 1999 the current street trading consent conditions were agreed and in 2001 the policy was amended to add Yarm Lane as a prohibited street, the regime has remained largely unchanged since.

The Council had no control in areas where it had not designated a street as either a consent or prohibited street. This had resulted in the Council being ineffective to respond to complaints associated with trading and inefficient in responding to requests to trade in areas where no provisions exist.

In addition to this the current list of prohibited and consent streets was no longer relevant in redeveloped areas and was inflexible with the developing Town Centres and Place strategies.

Consultation was critical to ensure any changes to the street trading resolution were clear and transparent for businesses, members, responsible authorities and the public. The statutory consultation process was followed including an advert in the Evening Gazette dated 11 July 2023. A report containing a summary of the results of the online public consultation was attached to the report.

Alongside the online consultation in depth discussions had helped to shape the revised policy and the application / determination process. These discussions had included:

- Existing traders
- Potential Traders
- Voluntary Sector
- Charity and non-profit groups
- Parish Councillors
- Members
- Council Departments

A copy of the revised draft consent street trading policy 2024, which outlined how officers would manage and review the regime including the application / determination process was attached to the report.

The most significant changes following the consultation had been around:

- Non for profit and charity fundraising (detailed at pg. 3 of the draft policy document)
- DBS and convictions information (detailed at pg. 8 and Appendix 3 of the draft policy document)

The revised policy document had been circulated for comments to all respondents to the consultation who provided contact details and again internally with Council departments. Additional responses to the revised policy were attached to the report.

On 14 November 2023 the General Licensing Committee considered the revised policy document, no further comments were received on the policy and the Committee agreed and noted the report. Officers explained to members the draft policy would also help as a regulatory tool for nuisance pedlars at events.

With regard next steps, the resolution to designate the whole borough a consent area for the purposes of street trading, the draft policy document and the summary of the consultation would be considered full Council for the final decision on 24 January 2024.

If the resolution is agreed the Council shall publish notice of the final resolution in a local newspaper and on the Council website advertising of the decision. (This should be no later than 28 days before the date of operation of the new scheme).

Taking these dates into consideration it was proposed any changes would come in to effect after 1 March 2024.

At its meeting held on 18 January 2024 Cabinet RESOLVED that:-

1. The contents of this report be noted.

2. Cabinet members comments be received.

Council RESOLVED that the proposed resolution to designate the whole borough as a consent area for the purposes of street trading be agreed.

COU/81/23 Appointments

Consideration was given to a report that reviewed the allocation of seats to political groups as prescribed by the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990.

RESOLVED that the following changes and appointments be approved:-

Executive Scrutiny Committee – Add Cllr Shakeel Hussain

Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee - Remove Cllr Paul Weston and Add Cllr Stefan Barnes

Place Select Committee - Remove Cllr Michelle Bendelow and Add Cllr Kevin Faulks

Planning Committee – Remove Cllr Stefan Barnes and Add Cllr Shakeel Hussain

Health and Wellbeing Board – Remove Cllr Kevin Faulks and Add Cllr Marcus Vickers

Standards Panel – Remove Cllr Kevin Faulks and Add Cllr Tony Riordan

Employee Appeals Panel – Remove Cllr Kevin Faulks and Add Cllr Tony Riordan

Home Safety Association – Add Cllr John Gardner

Member Advisory Panel – Remove Cllr Kevin Faulks and Add Cllr Shakeel Hussain

Commemoration Working Group – Remove Cllr Sylvia Walmsley and Add Cllr Lynn Hall

Audit and Governance Committee – Appointed - Cllr Ross Patterson

Corporate Parenting Board - Appointed - Cllr Mick Moore

Schools Workforce Joint Consultative – Appointed - Cllr Elsi Hampton

Moved by Councillor Eileen Johnson and seconded by Councillor Pauline Beall that Councillor Paul Rowling be appointed to the Children and Young People Select Committee.

Moved by Councillor Tony Riordan and seconded by Councillor Niall Innes that Councillor Lynn Hall be appointed to the Children and Young People Select Committee.

At this point a vote took place.

RESOLVED that Councillor Paul Rowling be appointed to the Children and Young People Select Committee.

Crime and Disorder Select Committee – The meeting was informed that Cllr Sally Ann Watson was withdrawing her nomination and therefore Cllr Barbara Inman was appointed to the Crime and Disorder Select Committee.

People Select Committee – The meeting was informed that Cllr Sufi Mubeen was withdrawing his nomination and therefore Cllr Eileen Johnson was appointed to the People Select Committee.

Hartlepool Power Station Community Liaison Committee – Appointed - Cllr Paul Rowling

Standing Advisory Council of Religious Education – Cllr Lisa Evans
Teesside and District Society for the Blind – Appointed - Cllr Shakeel Hussain

Moved by Cllr Rowling and seconded by Cllr Johnson that Cllr Jim Beall be appointed to the Ropner Trust The meeting was informed that Cllr Lynn Hall was withdrawing her nomination and therefore it was resolved to remove Cllr Jim Taylor and Cllr Jim Beall was appointed.

COU/82/23 Motion

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

"In October 2023, the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act received Royal Assent. This means that small companies and micro-entities, such as Stockton Hotels Company Limited, will have to file a profit and loss account, which with small companies having to also file a director's report. This change ensures that turnover is available on the public register. The Bill also removes the option for companies to prepare abridged accounts.

The requirements for a profit and loss account will be set out in regulations and will ensure companies are given fair warning of the changed expectations.

To get ahead of the regulations and promote transparency at the very highest-level to our residents, Stockton Borough Council in its role as shareholder resolves,

1. To request Stockton Hotels Company Limited to provide copies of all the profit and loss accounts, since incorporation, and within one month, so that Stockton Borough Council can publish them.
2. To request Stockton Hotels Company Limited to provide copies of all the Directors Reports, since incorporation, and within one month, so that Stockton Borough Council can publish them."

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

"Recognising the essential need for transparency across the public sector, particularly in organisations that directly or indirectly receive public funds, this Council acknowledges the recent developments in financial reporting regulations. In October 2023, the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act received Royal Assent. This means that small companies and micro entities, such as Stockton Hotels

Company Limited, will have to file a profit and loss account, with small companies having to also file a director's report. This change ensures that turnover is available on the public register. The Act also removes the option for companies to prepare abridged accounts.

The requirements for a profit and loss account will be set out in regulations and will ensure companies are given fair warning of the changed expectations.

In this spirit, and to set a precedent for openness and accountability, and to get ahead of the regulations and promote transparency at the very highest-level to our residents, this Council in its role as shareholder resolves:

1. To request Stockton Hotels Company Limited to provide copies of its profit and loss accounts so that this Council can publish them.
2. To request Stockton Hotels Company Limited to provide copies of its Directors Reports, so that this Council can publish them.
3. To agree an annual review of our companies by Cabinet to include consideration of financial and operational performance.

And to lead by example in promoting transparency and accountability, not only for this Council but also by encouraging as a constituent member of the Combined Authority equivalent practices, this Council resolves:

4. To request the Tees Valley Mayor to adopt similar measures of transparency for the companies under the control, or influence of the Tees Valley Combined Authority including an annual review by the Combined Authority Cabinet."

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:-

"Recognising the essential need for transparency across the public sector, particularly in organisations that directly or indirectly receive public funds, this Council acknowledges the recent developments in financial reporting regulations. In October 2023, the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act received Royal Assent. This means that small companies and micro entities, such as Stockton Hotels Company Limited, will have to file a profit and loss account, with small companies having to also file a director's report. This change ensures that turnover is available on the public register. The Act also removes the option for companies to prepare abridged accounts.

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3. To agree an annual review of our companies by Cabinet to include consideration of financial and operational performance.

And to lead by example in promoting transparency and accountability, not only for this Council but also by encouraging as a constituent member of the Combined Authority equivalent practices, this Council resolves:

4. To request the Tees Valley Mayor to adopt similar measures of transparency for the companies under the control, or influence of the Tees Valley Combined Authority including an annual review by the Combined Authority Cabinet."

COU/83/23 Motion

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

"During Prime Minister's Questions on Wednesday 22nd November 2023 the Home Secretary James Cleverly was heard making a derogatory comment about Stockton-on-Tees. Despite initially saying that he did not say anything inappropriate the Home Secretary proceeded to claim that the comment was aimed at the MP for Stockton North. As reported in the Sunday Mirror on Sunday 26th November, Artificial Intelligence has been used to clean up the recording. The cleaned-up recording proves that the comment was indeed aimed at our town.

The comment is an outrage and an insult to all those that call Stockton-on-Tees home. Stockton-on-Tees, made up of Stockton, Thornaby, Billingham, Yarm, Egglecliffe, Norton, Ingleby Barwick, and surrounding villages, is a proud area with a rich history. The Home Secretary's comments could not be a more inaccurate description of our area.

Although the Home Secretary has apologised for "unparliamentary language" in the House of Commons, no such apology has been made to the residents of Stockton-on-Tees. We the members of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council strongly condemn the comments and call for the Home Secretary to make a full apology to the people of Stockton-on-Tees. We resolve to write to the Home Secretary to invite him to come to Stockton to apologise. We also extend an invitation to the MPs for Stockton North and Stockton South to jointly sign this letter."

Members debated the motion.

At this point and in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.65 Councillor Paul Rowling 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 Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Richard Eglinton, 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 Ted Strike, 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 Alex Griffiths, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Susan Scott, Cllr Vanessa Sewell, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Emily Tate, Cllr Jim Taylor, Cllr Laura Tunney, Cllr Hilary Vickers and Cllr Marcus Vickers.

Abstentions:-

Cllr Alan Watson and Cllr Sally Ann Watson.

The motion was carried by 29 votes for to 20 votes against and 2 abstentions.

COU/84/23 Members' Question Time

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

"At the November meeting I submitted a motion and a question which were both rejected after the deadline. My motion was submitted on the Friday morning, and I received an email saying it had been rejected on the Monday. My question was submitted on the Wednesday and rejected the Wednesday after the deadline a full week later.

During the many emails exchanged it became apparent that all questions and motions are not read until the day after the deadline, meaning any alterations to the questions or motions cannot be made if the Proper Officer finds them unacceptable.

I believe this is unacceptable and this practice should be changed, even if this means bringing forward the deadline to midnight on the Thursday.

Can this be put in place as the current practice leads to questions and motions being rejected without any opportunity to amend them?

I understand that another councillor also had a question refused."

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

Thank you, Councillor Strike, for raising this issue, whilst the council procedures are not something that are my responsibility as leader of the council, they are as you will be aware matter for all members, the question does provide an opportunity to highlight the support that is available from our officers.

In considering how best to respond, I have asked the monitoring officer for his advice on this matter. Firstly, though a reminder that it is for us all as members, to ensure that the motions or questions we submit are in order and can therefore be considered in public at one of our meetings.

The monitoring officer advises me that the deadline for submissions is not just administrative, but a requirement set out in our constitution to ensure legal compliance and procedural integrity. Motions and questions submitted formally to democratic services are assessed for compliance with our standing orders after the deadline so that they can be included on the council agenda. At this point, at most only minimal changes for example for grammatical accuracy can be made.

It is a matter for us all as members to decide whether or not we wish to take advice from officers before formally submitting a question or motion to democratic services. Clearly not all questions or motions will require advice to be given, but it is a matter for members to decide whether or not advice is needed. If in doubt I would suggest to members to take advice.

At any point before the deadline, if a member wants to submit a question or motion then they can ask for advice, but it is the responsibility of us all as members to ask for that advice when it is needed. Officers cannot be the judge as to whether or not a member does or does not want such advice on the wording of their question or motion. I would also suggest that this issue is considered at the Members Advisory Panel.”

The following question had been submitted by Cllr Ted Strike for response by the Leader of the Council (Cllr Bob Cook):-

"In view of the current financial situation what are the council's plans, in particular the already agreed borrowings of approximately £140m which as yet have not been drawn down?"

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“All future costs associated with Council approved borrowing have been factored into the Councils Medium Term Financial Plan. The authority will only borrow when there is a cash requirement to do so and the timings and draw down of any future loans will be in line with the Councils approved Treasury Management Strategy.”

Cllr Ted Strike asked the following supplementary question:-

“You have answered the factored in but you won't know what the factored in price is if you then go and borrow another £20 million for example. Any additional borrowing will end up with additional costs year on year. I would suggest and I would hope that the Council would not do anymore borrowing until we have got that in-year deficit resolved?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“It is hard to say when you need to borrow money when you have live capital projects. As part of their Financial Resilience Index CIPFA has produced data comparing the proportion of financing costs to net revenue stream to the Councils statistical nearest neighbours and North-East 12 neighbours. Stockton's comparisons were shown in the 2023/24 Capital Strategy report presented within the MTFP report back in February 2023. These show that Stockton has the lowest cost of borrowing of the sample

authorities. We are careful when we need to borrow money and the reasons have to be valid.”

The following question had submitted by Cllr Lynn Hall for response by the Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture (Cllr Steve Nelson):-

"A robust Winter Plan is essential to benefit and safeguard our residents. Does the leader consider this year's plan executed to date was prepared in a timely way; facilitated members involvement and the dissemination of new information and initiatives were effectively shared?"

The Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture responded with:-

“The Adults Health and Wellbeing Winter Planning update is presented annually in various forums, in conjunction with statutory partners and has been to the relevant scrutiny committees and through due process in accordance with Council governance. The Adults Health and Wellbeing Winter planning update in its most current and up to date format was considered at Executive Scrutiny Committee in January 2024. The planning update also went to December 2023 Adults Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee. In November 2023 ICB colleagues came to Health and Wellbeing Board to give a Tees Valley Winter Planning update. The Winter Conference launches and informs System Wide Winter planning and this took place in September 2023. These plans are undertaken and delivered with system partners including Adults Health and Wellbeing. This is an operational plan which goes to the various forums for input by the various committees.

The Adults Health and Wellbeing planning update is to ensure appropriate health and care responses are maintained at times of pressure. To date this winter any pressures being seen in our health and care system are being managed well. In addition to the Winter Planning update there are also NHS escalation processes which the Council Adult Social Care team and Public Health team support with as needed. We continue to work with our Health partners to ensure winter planning is undertaken as early as possible and implemented in a timely way. This Winter Planning evolves, and changes as needed.

The references in the report to gritting and flooding were for information only. CFYA has a separate Winter Service Operational Plan that covers operational issues such as gritting. This Service Plan is supplemented by a Council Snow Plan. There is also a council operational flood plan.”

Cllr Lynn Hall asked the following supplementary question:-

“I did specifically ask for this question to go to the Leader of the Council as the overarching Winter Plan covers all directorates. We need to provide the best possible service for our residents. With my first formal opportunity to discuss this year’s Plan was in January 2024, can I have assurances that the updated Winter Plan for this year will involve all Members at an early stage. The involvement will hopefully widen the focus and improve health outcomes and work with partnerships across all directorates. Road matters and flood concerns are also important for our residents. The Winter Maintenance Plan is part of the overall Plan. It will also help us along the transformation journey. We are currently replacing potholes. All Councillors need to be involved. Can I ask if you are going to allow input at an earlier stage?”

The Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture responded with:-

"I think Cllr Hall maybe getting confused with the different plans. I'm involved with the Adults Health and Wellbeing Plan which is around Health and Wellbeing issues. The Plan went to various committees including the Health and Wellbeing Board where you were at when the presentation was given. The Director of Public Health was trying to be helpful by including gritting and flooding, those elements can be found in other plans and updates. This Plan starts in February and is worked at with partners and other committees. There is no decision associated with this Plan. To avoid confusion the Plan will be renamed next year the Adults, Health and Wellbeing Winter Planning Update."

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

"Can the Leader please inform me how many Corporate Credit Cards, and Procurement Cards, are available to officers and staff on Stockton Borough Council, what is the maximum authorised spending limit on these cards, and can he offer the taxpayers of Stockton Borough reassurance that strong governance is in place to monitor and review the use of these cards?"

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

"There are currently 105 corporate credit cards in operation used by officers for one off purchases.

The maximum authorisation spending limit differs from card to card and is based on the type of purchases the officer will be authorised to make via the card. The standard limit ranges from between £500 - £2000 per month. Any cardholder requiring a higher limit is by exception and specific justification.

At the point of requesting a card the officer needs to complete an application pack which contains a Corporate Credit Cardholder Manual which provides a detailed overview of how the cards should be used and reminding them that improper use could lead to suspension of the card and / or disciplinary action. The Internal Audit team carry out random checks of card activity to ensure proper usage.

Users are required to sign an Employee Agreement which outlines the terms and conditions they will be required to comply with regarding card usage. This includes a requirement to only use the card for business purposes, to keep appropriate records and ensure that VAT invoices and receipts are uploaded into the bank's card system in a timely manner, to report lost or stolen cards etc. The card holder's Line Manager is required to confirm and approve all expenditure."

The following question was submitted by Cllr Ted Strike for response by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Housing (Cllr Nigel Cooke):-

"Residents of new houses on The Rings are now having to pay an annual fee to a management company.

The management company for Permission on the Rings is Gateway.

Since being elected on the new North Ward I have received a large number of complaints, these include the poor service from Gateway, late payment fees if the

maintenance fee is not paid on time, but the main complaint is that when they received their bill almost 90% of the bill is down to "Admin expenses".

After 3 years residents can elect their own directors, but must employ a management company.

I believe that SBC could provide this service a lot cheaper than residents are paying now.

I do not believe this would cost council taxpayers a penny and SBC could make a profit whilst reducing the price these residents are currently paying.

Would SBC look into the possibility of providing this service. There are of course numerous new build estates across the Borough in the same situation. This is not a problem unique to Ingleby Barwick?"

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Housing responded with:-

"I understand how this issue impacts on residents across the Borough. On construction of a new development, the developer has a choice whether to offer the land for adoption by the Council or to keep the land private and employ a management company to maintain the land. The Management Company can charge the residents a fee for this, which would be written into their deeds, when purchasing their property. Unfortunately, the Council cannot influence the developer's decision. Should a developer wish to offer their land for adoption, then this would be considered by the Council, subject to the land being transferred to the Council, all works being up to an adoptable standard and the payment of a commuted lump sum for future maintenance."

Cllr Ted Strike asked the following supplementary question:-

"Since being elected myself and the other ward councillors met with the officers who explained all this we then gate-crashed a meeting with Gateway where we were told that we were not welcome. The residents can after 3 years form their own directorship and they are entitled to employ their own management company. The question is could Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council look into being a management company?"

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

"Whilst I understand the sentiment behind the question and the high feelings there are a lot of barriers between what he is suggesting. If Cllr Strike would like greater clarification on the procedures and protocols I happy for officers to provide that. It is essentially private land, the only way forward would be for the developer of that land to actually approach the Council for adoption. Clearly the Council would have to be happy that the land is up to the standard where we would want to adopt the land. There would need to be a commuted sum for maintenance."

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 me what the internal process the council uses to price repair/maintenance/project work?"

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

The potential range of assets implied by the question is very wide, including highways infrastructure, schools, urgent safety works etc.

In an attempt to answer this question we have focused on the small scale works that are typically requested at Ward level and may be funded through the Members Ward budgets. Officers have indicated that they are happy to discuss the technical process and context for larger schemes directly with Cllr Innes if required.

In relation to the small-scale work, including play areas, bins, benches and other street furniture, estimates for maintenance are produced on a case-by-case basis, but informed by costs for comparable assets we already maintain. We calculate future anticipated costs using a comprehensive schedule of rates for repair or replacement, these schedules encompass a range of factors including labour, materials, plant, traffic management and supervision.

However, it should be noted that small items integrated into a setting which is already subject to an inspection and maintenance regime, will in practice be incorporated into a programme for that site. For any anticipated material, equipment or specialist contractor input, we follow Council procurement procedures.”

Councillor Niall Innes asked the following supplementary question:-

“Can the Leader tell me why there seems to be an inflating of the prices that we are quoted for having works done that come out of our budget?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“One of the issues that the Council faces is that as a Council we need to make sure that any works that are done are up to standard and that nobody is injured and therefore it is difficult as everything we put in has to be maintained.”

The following question was submitted by Cllr Stefan Houghton for response by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Housing (Cllr Nigel Cooke):-

"In addition to the successful Stockton South Levelling Up bid, finance was obtained by re-purposing section 106 funds to improve the popular play area at Preston Park. These improvements have been delayed, most recently by the larger capital programme.

As the years have passed since these funds were obtained to improve the play area, I would welcome an update for my benefit and all members whose residents will eventually have the opportunity to enjoy this completed project?"

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Housing responded with:-

“The section 106 funding to which Cllr Houghton refers is approximately £90,000. The cost for renewing the play area in Preston Park, removing equipment that is now close

to the end of its safe life and replacing it with features of a similar scale and type, has been estimated to be £350,000.

Officers have been working to try to identify the additional resource required to redevelop the play area but have not yet been able to secure the funds required. Officers are now planning to phase the work, undertaking initial work that utilises the 106 resource to coincide with the work being funded by the LUF grant for south Stockton.

It is not the case that the current capital programme has delayed efforts to complete works on the play area.”

COU/85/23 Forward Plan and Leader’s Statement

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

The last Council meeting was held on the 22 November last year. Since then Cabinet met on the 14 December and 18 January and considered the following matters:-

- Financial Update and Medium-Term Financial Plan
- 0-19 Children's Public Health Programme: Partnership with Harrogate & District Foundation Trust
- 2023 Event Summary and 2024 Memorial Lighting Calendar
- Lived Experience and Making It Real Board
- Annual Report of the Governing Body for the Learning & Skills Service
- Governor Appointments
- Powering Our Future - Programme Update
- Local Plan 5 Year Review and Consent Street Trading Policy Review

Cabinet would next meet on the 12 February MTFP followed by a further meeting on 15 February and consider:-

- Annual Report ISAG
- Environmental Sustainability & Carbon Reduction Strategy 2022-32 Monitoring Report
- School Performance 2022 - 2023 for Vulnerable Pupils
- Procedure for Admission of Pupils to Primary and Secondary Schools in September 2025
- Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education Constitution
- Scrutiny Review of Domestic Waste Collections, Kerbside Recycling and Green Waste