

COUNCIL

A meeting of Council was held on Wednesday 29 May 2024.

Present: The Worshipful the Mayor (Cllr John Gardner), Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Michelle Bendelow, Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Richard Eglinton, Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Nathan Gale, Cllr Clare Besford, Cllr Alex Griffiths, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, 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 Jim Taylor, Cllr Hilary Vickers, Cllr Marcus Vickers, Cllr Alan Watson, Cllr Sally Ann Watson, Cllr Paul Weston and Cllr Katie Weston.

Officers: Mike Greene (CE), Ged Morton, Julie Butcher, Judy Trainer, Peter Bell, Garry Cummings (DCE&F,T&P), Reuben Kench (DoCS,E&C) and Carolyn Nice (A,H&W).

Also in attendance: Members of the Public.

Apologies: Cllr Stefan Barnes, Cllr Diane Clarke OBE, Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Dan Fagan, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

COU/118/24 Welcome and Evacuation Procedure

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

COU/119/24 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

COU/120/24 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meetings held on 20 March and 3 April 2024.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March and 3 April 2024 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

COU/121/24 Public Question Time

The following question had been submitted by John McDermottroe for response by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing (Cllr Nigel Cooke):-

“Is there a danger the £20M levelling up funding for Billingham Town Centre will be lost if part of it is to be used for housing that was not part of the plan?”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

“Officers are in close liaison with civil servants in the Department for Levelling Up Homes and Communities (DLUHC) in regard to the detailed elements of the Levelling Up Fund award and expenditure items within that programme. There is no suggestion that a residential led redevelopment in Billingham town centre would jeopardise or affect the award of funding throughout conversations and correspondence with DLUHC.”

John McDermottroe asked the following supplementary question:-

“Whenever I ask any questions about the consultation, I’m asked to refer to the consultation from 2020 and I quote from that ‘there is very little desire for housing’ in that consultation so why are you going against the wishes of the people of Billingham?”

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing responded with:-

“Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has a strong track record for delivering regeneration schemes across the Borough and I’m delighted we are in a position where we can help and take control to lead the shape of Billingham’s future. In this ambitious plan the oversupply of retail space will be brought into line with demand and the continuation of changes that have been made over recent years to make the town centre the place that people want to visit, to live, to work and to do business. This is very much in-line with the masterplan that has been developed following that conversation a number of years ago.”

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

“The Department for Health and Social Care have opened a consultation ending on 17th June proposing the mass fluoridation of 1.6 million North East people including the residents Stockton-on-Tees. Their reasoning includes that the compulsory medication of our drinking water will reduce the gap in oral health between the most and least deprived regions.

Unlike other public health measures, such as vaccination, where individuals can opt-out, fluoridation allows no such choice. It affects everyone who relies on tap water for drinking, cooking, and daily hygiene. This one-size-fits-all approach disregards individual consent and medical history, where fluoride may not be advised for everyone.

Secondly, the potential health risks include dental fluorosis in children, bone problems, thyroid function, diabetes II. It is a neurotoxin and enzyme disruptor. In light of these concerns, I urge the council to consider the precautionary principle. Let us not introduce a substance into our water supply when there is reasonable doubt about its safety and necessity.

Instead, let us invest in targeted dental health programs that educate and empower individuals to take charge of their dental health without compromising their right to choose what goes into their bodies.”

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

“Firstly, I’d like to clarify that the revised Health and Care Act (2022) transferred responsibility for water fluoridation from local authorities to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State now has responsibility for establishing any new water fluoridation schemes, or for varying or terminating existing water fluoridation schemes in England;

The revenue costs of any schemes would also transfer to the Secretary of State. This will allow central government to directly take responsibility for fluoridation schemes.

In response to your concerns regarding water fluoridation I would respond as follows:

Fluoride is a mineral that occurs naturally in water and some foods such as fish and is known to be important for tooth and bone health. The amount naturally found in water varies across the UK for geological reasons. The extraction of decayed teeth is the most common reason for hospital admission of under-18-year-olds in England and is particularly high in Yorkshire and Humber and the North East. Between 2018 and 2021 over 2000 children under 5 were admitted to hospital in the North East for dental caries. Community water fluoridation schemes involve adding fluoride to community drinking water to a level which is known to reduce tooth decay; the schemes also disproportionately benefit those who live in areas of greater deprivation.

Fluoride is already currently added to drinking water in 35 local authorities in the UK. Approximately 700,000 people in the North East have been drinking artificially adjusted water for over 50 years (in Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland (Tyne Valley and Coast) and County Durham (Consett, Stanley, Crook and Lanchester). Naturally fluoridated water occurs in Hartlepool (since 1840) and the East Durham Coast (since 1890). Fluoride levels in drinking water are closely monitored by the Drinking Water Inspectorate. The World Health Organisation recommends a maximum level of 1.5mg/l and the proposed level of fluoridation through the new scheme would be below this at 1mg/l.

Based on academic research, Public Health England estimates that water fluoridation would reduce tooth decay in 5-year-old children living in areas with naturally low fluoride levels by at least 17%. In the most deprived areas, the reduction would be greater with 28%. It is estimated that fluoridation would half hospital admissions for tooth extractions in children.

The water fluoridation health monitoring report (2022) confirmed the protective effect of fluoridated drinking water and that children and young people in the most deprived area benefitted the most.

The Chief Medical Officer states that due to weak and conflicting evidence, there is no significant association between water fluoridation and harm to health. The Public Health England water fluoridation health monitoring reports from 2014, 2018 and 2022 support this (The Office for Health Improvements and Disparity, on behalf of the Sec of State, has a legal duty to monitor the effects of water fluoridation schemes on health and report every 4 years), as well as international evidence. The OHID monitoring reports also keep the scientific literature around potential impacts on wider

health under constant review. Approximately one in 10 people in England currently have fluoride added to their drinking water supplies (OHID health monitoring report, 2022). The 2022 report concluded:

‘This report supports earlier findings and wider evidence that water fluoridation, at levels recommended in the UK, is a safe and effective public health measure to reduce dental caries and inequalities in dental health.’

Locally we have a programme of oral health improvement which supports the population-wide benefits of the proposed community water fluoridation scheme. This includes oral health promotion and education, toothbrushing schemes in our local primary schools and system-wide activity to promote healthy diet with the benefits this brings to oral health.”

Chris Lipthorpe asked the following supplementary question:-

“Should people not be given fully informed consent what goes into their drinking water?”

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

“You would need to take that up with central government, I stressed in my original answer that this is the responsibility of central government and the Secretary of State. People are perfectly entitled to their own opinions. Consultation is on-going and I would encourage you to make your submissions to the consultation and include the Health and Wellbeing Board.”

COU/122/24 Appointments/Amendments to Committees, Panel Joint /Outside Bodies for 2023/27

The Council had previously approved appointments to its Committees, Panels and Joint/Outside Bodies for 2023/27.

A request had been received from a political group to amend one of its positions on the Cleveland Police and Crime Panel, as follows:

Remove - Councillor Pauline Beall Add - Councillor Paul Rowling

RESOLVED that the amendment be approved.

COU/123/24 Director of Public Health Annual Report

The Director of Public Health Annual Report 2023/24 was brought to Cabinet for consideration.

Under the Health and Social Care Act (2012), the Director of Public Health has a duty to prepare an independent annual report. The report followed the Director of Public Health report presented in November 2023 which reviewed the public health response to Covid-19 in Stockton-on-Tees.

The Director of Public Health Annual Report 2023/24 highlighted the challenge of persistent health inequalities experienced by people in Stockton-on-Tees. Health

inequalities and poor health and wellbeing had a significant impact on people's lives, were unjust and largely preventable.

The report highlighted existing examples of good practice and strong partnerships with other organisations and the voluntary and community sector but was clear that a holistic and systematic approach was required to go further and faster in addressing inequalities.

The proposed approach with interventions in civic society, community and services based on a self-assessment complements the Council's Powering our Future policy.

With regard to consultation and engagement the report described some of the key work undertaken with partners and communities to address health inequalities. Working collaboratively with communities, partners and councillors was essential in addressing health inequalities.

With regard to the next steps 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:-

1. The report be noted.
2. The Population Intervention Triangle model be adopted across the Council and it's work with partners as set out in the DPH Report 2023/4.

COU/124/24 Motion - Cllr Ted Strike - Consent Street Trading Policy

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

Whilst we recognise the need to update the regulations on the "Consent Street Trading Policy" the current rules are penalising craft stalls, Farmers markets and community events, something I am sure was never intended.

That Council, at the earliest opportunity amend the current rules to exclude all community events and Farmers Markets from these charges. These include, but are not limited to:

Ingleby Barwick Family Fun Weekend
Ingleby Barwick Community Market
Ingleby Barwick Light Switch on
The Thornaby Show
The Billingham Show
The Festival of Thrift
Northern Dales Farmers Markets
Norton Green Market"

The Worshipful the Mayor informed the meeting that in-line with the Council Constitution the motion will be forwarded to the Licensing Committee for consideration without further debate.

COU/125/24 Members' Question Time

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

“The staff in Democratic Services had kindly provided members and officers with the dates of the Full Council Meetings, for the Municipal Year 2024/25 entering them into the diary as long ago as May 2023. This was greatly appreciated by members and officers as they could plan their other commitments, holidays, work, etc, around those dates.

Prior to the publication of the agenda for the last Annual Council Meeting on the 3rd of April, the date of the subsequent meeting of Full Council was last week, the 22nd of May, and had been for over a year.

Once this agenda was published, it became apparent that last week’s diary date, the 22nd of May, had been changed to today, the 29th of May.

I am informed that the date of the meeting was changed on the instruction of the Council Leader.

Can the Leader of the Council please provide members with the reason(s) he instructed that the well-established diary date of the 22nd of May was changed to today?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“Thank you, Cllr Riordan, for your question.

Firstly, it's important to clarify that setting the dates for Full Council meetings is not the responsibility of officers. The schedule of meetings is proposed at the Annual Meeting each year and voted on by all members. Any member can propose amendments during that meeting.

As Leader of the Council, whilst I can propose how our business is conducted, including proposals on meeting dates to be put to a meeting, the final decision is made democratically by all members at the Annual Meeting. The dates in the democracy diary before then are only indicative.

The change from the 22nd to the 29th of May was raised and agreed upon collectively at the Annual Meeting, not decided by me. If there were any objections, they could have been raised then.”

Councillor Tony Riordan asked the following supplementary question:-

“The proposed date was changed prior to the Annual Meeting on your instruction, can you clarify that?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“The dates are set at the Annual Meeting and are not set by officers. The dates are voted upon and are an agenda item at the Annual Meeting. There were no objections

to the dates and the change of date and I can clarify that the dates had not been set until the Annual Meeting.”

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

“The Leader will be aware that on the 24th of January 2024, this Council debated a motion that, in part, related to Stockton Hotels Company Ltd (Hampton by Hilton).

The motion was carried and (in part) read,

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.

Can the Leader please inform members when the very simple task of compiling these previously written and retained documents, and publishing them, will be?”

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

“Thank you, Councillor Riordan, for your question. There are two key parts to address: the provision of information by the hotel company to the council and the subsequent publication of that information.

First, regarding the provision of information, the council requested documents from the company directors, who must, by law, act independently of the council. These documents were provided, and any council member who requested to see them is able to. The independent auditors were consulted to determine what information the company must provide to the council to meet its obligations.

The second part concerns the publication of these documents. Once the information was provided, the council needed to decide how to publish it. As you are aware, from March of this year, we entered the pre-election period for the Tees Valley Mayor and Police and Crime Commissioner elections. During this time, the code of practice on publicity prohibits the council from publishing any information that could be deemed political. Given that the hotels success has not been approached in this chamber in a bi-partisan way, publishing this information during the pre-election period would have contravened the pre-election advice from the monitoring officer. Therefore, we had to wait until after the elections to proceed with publication.

Additionally, the council has obligations to ensure that any published information is accessible, such as through screen readers and other assistive technologies. We cannot simply publish unprepared documents on our website without meeting these accessibility standards. This work has now been completed, and the additional documentation is available on the council’s website. These documents will also be included in our regular schedule of published information under our publicity scheme.”

COU/126/24 Forward Plan and Leader’s Statement

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

Council last met on the 3 April for the Annual Meeting. Since then, Cabinet met on the 18 April and 16 May March and considered the following matters:

- The Scrutiny Review of Cost of Living Response
- A Programme Update for Powering Our Future
- The Scrutiny Review of Outdoor Play Provision
- A report on the Delivering Better Value Agreement with DfE
- A Progress Update on Fairer Stockton on Tees
- The implementation of Selective Licensing of Private Rented Accommodation
- The Director of Public Health's Annual Report 2023 to 2024

Cabinet would meet again on 17 June and consider:

- A Scrutiny Review of Access to GPs and Primary Medical Care
- A Scrutiny Review of Unauthorised Roadside Advertising
- A Regeneration Update considering Thornaby Town Centre and Billingham Town Centre
- A Council Plan Update

The next meeting of full Council would be on 24 July.

Members were reminded of the fact that a general election has been called for 4 July and the Council was now in the pre-election period. The monitoring officer had issued advice to members and officers in respect of this period.

Some highlights coming up soon will be the Eid Fuson Festival on 2 June, D-Day commemoration on 6 June and Armed Forces Day on Thursday 27 June.