

**DECISIONS SHOULD NOT BE IMPLEMENTED BEFORE
WEDNESDAY, 23 APRIL 2025**

CABINET
Tuesday, 8 April 2025

PRESENT – Councillors Harker (Chair), Curry, Garner, McCollom, McEwan, Porter, Roche and Wallis.

INVITEES – Councillors Dulston and Snedker.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor M. Nicholson.

C129 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

**C130 TO HEAR RELEVANT REPRESENTATION (FROM MEMBERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC) ON
ITEMS ON THIS CABINET AGENDA.**

No representations were made by Members or members of the public in attendance at the meeting.

C131 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS CABINET HELD ON 4TH MARCH 2025

Submitted - The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Cabinet held on 4th March 2025.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be confirmed as a correct record.

REASON – They represent an accurate record of the meeting.

C132 MATTERS REFERRED TO CABINET

There were no matters referred back for re-consideration to this meeting.

C133 ISSUES ARISING FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no issues arising from Scrutiny considered at this meeting.

C134 KEY DECISIONS:-

(1) UPDATED STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT - PART 1 (LOCAL PLAN)

The Cabinet Member with the Economy Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection to seek approval for consultation on an updated version of its Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) Part 1 (Local Plan).

The submitted report stated that a SCI sets out how Local Planning Authorities will involve local communities, businesses and key stakeholders in the preparation of the Local Plan and any future Development Plan Documents (DPD's) or Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's), and that authorities are required to review their SCI's at least every five years. It was reported that the Darlington SCI – Part 1 was last reviewed in August 2020 with temporary updates made to reflect national COVID 19 pandemic restrictions.

The submitted report outlined that the proposed update would remove these restrictions and allow some other minor updates to be consulted on prior to the statutory consultation periods on the Local Plan Review. It was reported that an updated Design of New Development Supplementary (SPD) would also be prepared and consulted upon alongside the review of the Local Plan in line with the content of the updated SCI, and that once consultation had taken place and any comments received had been considered, an updated version would be brought back to Cabinet and Council for adoption.

RESOLVED - That the submitted Draft Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) Part 1 (Local Plan) be agreed for a public consultation.

REASON – The Council is required to have an up-to-date SCI as part of the plan review process.

(2) ANNUAL PROCUREMENT PLAN AND PROCUREMENT STRATEGY

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Executive Director of Resources and Governance to present the Annual Procurement Plan Update to Cabinet for approval. Cabinet was asked to consider and approve the assessment of contracts that are considered to be strategic or non-strategic.

The submitted report also updated Cabinet on the outcomes of procurement(s) previously designated as Strategic, about the decisions taken by the Procurement Board to waive the Contract Procedure Rules and on the implementation of the Procurement Act 2023 and the new e-tendering system.

Reference was made to social value, the previous social value delivered and the work that could be undertaken to engage small and medium sized businesses in the procurement process.

RESOLVED - (a) That the assessment of strategic and non-strategic contracts as presented in Appendix 1 of the submitted report be approved, and that:

- (i) Further reports/ updates on the procurement process for those contracts designated as strategic (including decisions made by the Procurement Board) be brought to Cabinet.
- (ii) The contract award decisions for the contracts designated as non-strategic be delegated to the appropriate Directorate as listed in the plan at Appendix 1.
- (iii) The contract award decisions for the contracts designated as strategic, as listed in the plan at Appendix 1, be delegated to the Procurement Board to approve and

will be reported back to Cabinet.

(b) That the contents of this report in respect of the update of strategic procurements, Procurement Board waiver decisions, and Social Value be noted.

(c) That the adoption of the Procurement Strategy 2025–2027, be approved.

REASONS – (a) In respect of strategic/non-strategic contracts, the recommendations are supported by the following reasons: -

- (i) The Contract Procedure Rules require Cabinet to approve the designation of contracts as strategic and non-strategic, and
- (ii) Contracts designated strategic are of high value and high significance in respect of the impact on residents, Health & Safety and public safety.
- (iii) The contracts designated non-strategic are of a lower value and lower significance in respect of the impact on residents and public safety.

(b) In respect of Procurement Board waiver decisions, the recommendations are supported by the following reasons: -

- (i) In order to comply with the Contract Procedure Rules.
- (ii) To provide Cabinet with information about the decisions made by the Procurement Board.
- (iii) To supplement the reports that are taken to Cabinet about proposed spend over £100,000, that are set out in the Annual Procurement Plan and the in-year update to that report.

(c) In respect of the Procurement Strategy 2025–2027, the recommendation is supported to ensure we have a strategy which directs and informs our procurement activity and works in line with the Procurement Act.

C135 NORTH EAST DECLARATION FOR A SMOKEFREE FUTURE

The Cabinet Member with the Health and Housing Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Executive Director of People which invited Cabinet to support and welcome the North East Declaration for a Smoke Free Future.

The submitted report stated that towards the end of 2023, a new North East Declaration for Smoke Free Future was launched by Fresh, the Association of Directors of Public Health North East and the NHS North East and North Cumbria NHS Integrated Care Board. It was reported that this was a UK first for any region to have such a clear statement of intent and to demonstrate the scale of commitment and collaboration.

RESOLVED - (a) That Members support the progress made in Darlington working towards a Smoke Free Future.

(b) That Members welcomed joining the other 11 North East Local Authorities in supporting and endorsing the North East Declaration for a Smoke Free Future.

REASONS – (a) Smoking causes harm throughout people’s lives, and is a major cause of preventable ill health, disability and death and is a driver of health inequalities.

(b) Recent data shows that almost 7,000 adults in Darlington smoke.

(c) Making smoking history is a priority in the Darlington Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

C136 PLAN FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS

The Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member with the Stronger Communities Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Chief Executive to inform Cabinet about the Government’s Plan for Neighbourhoods which will provide up to £20 million of funding and support over 10 years to 75 places across the UK, including Darlington, and to seek approval of recommendations to allow Officers to support the Towns Board take on the role of Neighbourhood Board and make the required submission to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) by 22 April.

The submitted report stated that a prospectus for Plan for Neighbourhoods was published on 5 March 2025, which outlined the new approach and confirming that Darlington is one of the 75 eligible authorities. It was reported that £20 million will be provided to the Council over the next 10 years.

The submitted report also highlighted that the Council was required to support the restructuring of the Towns Board to become a Neighbourhood Board, to develop a 10-year Regeneration Plan and provide oversight of its delivery.

Focus was given to the role and remit of the Neighbourhood Board and how greater emphasis could be placed on community involvement.

RESOLVED - (a) That a review of the Towns Board membership and structure ,to enable it to discharge to role of the ‘Neighbourhood Board’, be approved, and for the required submission to MHCLG to be made by 22 April 2025.

(b) That the reconstituted Neighbourhood Board be supported to develop a Regeneration Plan which complements the Council Plan.

(c) That it was agreed that the Chief Executive review the current support provided to ensure that there is capacity within the Council to deliver the initiative.

(d) That it was agreed that the Chief Executive be given delegated authority to progress recommendations 6a and 6c in consultation with the Leader and Stronger Communities Portfolio member.

REASONS - (a) To address the criteria laid down in the guidance.

(b) In order to secure the grant funding.

C137 ADOPTION OF FINALISED APPRAISAL FOR THE STOCKTON AND DARLINGTON RAILWAY: NORTHGATE CONSERVATION AREA INCLUDING CHANGES TO ITS BOUNDARY AND NAME

The Cabinet Member with the Economy Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection, which sought approval to adopt the finalised Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area Appraisal, including changes to its boundary and name. It was reported that the document that has been submitted is called 'Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area Appraisal. Finalised document. March 2025'.

The submitted report provided justification for adopting the finalised appraisal for the Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area. Members were advised that the draft version of the appraisal (September 2024) had been subject to a six-week public consultation period, and that amendments had been made in light of the comments received.

It was reported that by adopting the finalised appraisal, a new, much larger Conservation Area boundary would be designated by the Council, and that the conservation area name would officially be changed from Northgate Conservation Area to Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area.

Reference was made to the appreciation of our heritage value and whether the Council had the capability and capacity to respond.

RESOLVED - (a) That Cabinet recommends that the Council adopts the finalised appraisal for the Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area.

(b) That Cabinet recommends that the Council adopts the finalised boundary for the Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area (see chapter 6.0 of the appraisal).

(c) That Cabinet recommends to Council the adoption of the name change from Northgate Conservation Area to Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area.

(d) That Cabinet recommends that Council authorises the amendment of finalised Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area Appraisal with regards to the text marked in yellow, to reflect the adopted status of the document. The adopted appraisal will be named: Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area Appraisal. Adopted document. March 2025.

REASONS - The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:

(a) The Northgate Conservation Area is a designated heritage asset of international significance due to its structures and associations directly linked to the birth/early years of the Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR) of 1825. Despite its high importance, it has been on the national Heritage at Risk Register since 2010.

- (b) The bicentennial of the S&DR is in September this year. The Council has been making significant investments in preparation for the celebrations inside the Conservation Area (e.g. Hopetown Darlington, Edward Pease house).
- (c) The current Northgate Conservation Area appraisal was adopted in January 2007 and is now deemed inadequate and out of date. The present Conservation Area boundary dates from 2003.
- (d) The new appraisal picks up some of the 'unfinished' work carried out by Durham County Council (2022) and Land Use Consultants (2021). It provides a detailed record and analysis of the existing Conservation Area, as well as proposals for boundary changes and name change, and suggestions for improvements so that the Conservation Area may eventually be removed from the Heritage at Risk register.
- (e) The responses on the draft document were generally very supportive of the appraisal and its proposals, including the feedback received from Historic England and the Friends of the Stockton & Darlington Railway.
- (f) Once the new appraisal has been adopted it will provide an evidence base for managing change in the area and form a material consideration in the Planning process, replacing the 2007 document.
- (g) It will also assist if funding is sought for larger regeneration schemes within the amended boundary. Historic England confirmed that they will not provide funding for improvement works within the Conservation Area until the new appraisal, including boundary changes and name change, has been adopted.

C138 HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

The Cabinet Member with the Stronger Communities Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Chief Executive requesting that consideration be given to a programme of support to deliver the fifth extension of the Government funded Household Support Fund (HSF) Extension for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

The submitted report stated that the Household Support Fund (HSF) will be extended from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026, as part of a number of measures to provide help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living.

It was reported that the current programme is being delivered effectively, meeting spend and output targets, and it was therefore proposed that the programme delivered in this next round takes forward most elements in the current programme. A programme aimed at maximising household incomes was also included using the Low Income Family Tracker, targeting groups identified as requiring particular attention. It was stated that a delivery plan outlining spending plans needed to be submitted to the Department of Work and Pensions by 30 May 2025.

RESOLVED – (a) That the proposed programme and estimated costings outlined within the submitted report be approved.

(b) That delegation be given to the Chief Executive, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Stronger Communities, to amend funding pots as necessary to ensure full utilisation of the grant within the time period.

(c) That any revisions to the submission made to Government be approved.

REASONS - (a) To address the criteria laid down in the guidance.

(b) In order to secure the grant funding.

C139 AUDIT OF ACCOUNTS 2023/24

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Executive Director of Resources and Governance to present reports by the Council's external auditors, Forvis Mazars, on the audit for the year ended 31 March 2024.

The submitted report stated that, in accordance with the Accounts and Audit (Amendment) Regulations 2022, all Local Authorities were required to produce the draft annual Statement of Accounts by 31 May 2024, and an audited set published by 30 September 2024. Due to a national backlog in the publication of audited accounts reaching an unacceptable level on 30 September 2024, the Accounts and Audit (Amendment) Regulations 2024 came into force, and these regulations introduced statutory 'backstop dates' to help clear the backlog of audits and help rebuild assurance.

It was reported that the Amendment Regulations required the Council to publish its 2023/24 Statement of Accounts, including the auditor's opinion, by the backstop date of 28 February 2025. As a result of the backstop arrangements (the 2022/23 accounts were not signed off by our previous auditors until 29 November 2024), and Forvis Mazars had determined that there was insufficient time between the backstop dates to complete their audit procedures to obtain sufficient appropriate evidence to complete a full audit, and therefore Forvis Mazars would issue a disclaimer of opinion on the 2023/24 financial statements.

It was noted that Darlington was not the only Authority in this position and this position had arisen due to the national backlog situation which was outside of this Authority's control.

RESOLVED - (a) That the Audit Strategy and Completion Report for the year ended 31 March 2024, be noted.

(b) That the Auditor's Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2024, be noted.

REASON - To enable Cabinet to receive the results of external audit work carried out.

(**NOTE:** The Chair varied the order of the Agenda and took this item immediately prior to C134 at the meeting).

C140 MEMBERSHIP CHANGES - TO CONSIDER ANY MEMBERSHIP CHANGES TO OTHER BODIES TO WHICH CABINET APPOINTS.

There were no membership changes reported at the meeting.

C141 TO CONSIDER THE EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS :-

**DECISIONS DATED –
FRIDAY, 11 APRIL 2025**