



Hartlepool
Borough Council

Housing, Growth and Communities Committee

Minutes and Decision Record

11 March 2026

Meeting commenced

Time: 5pm

Location: Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor: Karen Oliver (In the Chair)

Councillors: Matthew Dodds, Jim Lindridge, Amanda Knapper, Martin Scarborough

Standards Co-opted members:

Stephen Smith (Greatham Parish Council)

Officers: Gemma Ptak, Director of Housing, Growth and Communities
Sarah Scarr, Head of Service (Heritage and Open Spaces)
Gemma Jones, Scrutiny and Legal Support Officer

7. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Fiona Cook and Corinne Male.

8. Declarations of Interest

None.

9. Minutes

Minutes from 9 December 2025 – received.

10. Hartlepool Cohesion Strategy – Here For You - *Director of Housing, Growth and Communities*

Type of decision

Non-Key

Purpose of report

To raise awareness of the national and local policy landscape in relation to cohesion, resilience and communities.

To share Hartlepool's local cohesion strategy - 'Here for You', to be adopted by Hartlepool Borough Council, acknowledging this is a multi-sector and stakeholder strategy but that the Council plays a key leadership role to drive this work forward.

Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee

The Director of Housing, Growth and Communities was in attendance to introduce Hartlepool's cohesion strategy. The Director acknowledged that this strategy would be a foundation to build upon in working towards managing some of the pressures and tensions that communities are facing. They advised this was an important matter, particularly after the period of riots and civil unrest that had taken place in the town in the summer of 2024.

Members were advised the council had led on a coordinated recovery effort to understand the impact of the riots on the town and what had led to the civil unrest. As part of this process a national expert had been commissioned to lead on the development of a local cohesion strategy.

The Director outlined the engagement process for this piece of work including the conversations held with residents, communities and stakeholders, as detailed within the report. It was noted that this strategy aligns with national framework and policy including –

- Common Ground: Building Cohesive Communities
- Independent commission on Neighbourhoods
- The Governments Pride in Place Programme
- UK Government Resilience Action Plan

In the discussion that followed a Member queried if the discussions held with residents and the wider community had brought up concerns regarding Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO). The Director explained that conversations had largely been held around housing, communities and the environment but acknowledged that HMO can contribute to negative cohesion within a community. The Chair advised that concerns regarding HMOs were being investigated by Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services Committee, including examining new measures that could be implemented to address some of the issues arising.

A Member raised a matter that had been discussed at another committee. This was regarding people being moved into the town from out of area by different organisations and the resources required to support these families. The Director advised that there were different reasons for this such as resettlement programmes and the discharge of homeless duty by other Local Authorities, of which there had been 49 cases since January 2025. It was acknowledged that this was a complex issue with some aspects, such as the discharge of homeless duty, being investigated further. It was reiterated that the aim of the strategy was to strengthen communities and be a starting point to build on community cohesion.

A Member raised concerns of unrest between some communities due to religion. The Chair advised there had been a long history of different religions being practiced in the town with no issues. They expressed that community cohesion was not just about race or religion, other aspects, such as the decline in residents' associations, had also had an impact. This strategy was the start of strengthening and building empowered communities, whilst being evidence and data led and reflecting national policy. It was also noted that lots of people were moving to Hartlepool by choice and this work would help communities build resilience and thrive.

A Member expressed concerns over the negative impact of spreading misinformation and using divisive language.

A resident queried when engagement events had taken place with regards to the development of the strategy. The Director advised that a lot of the evidence was gathered from interacting with people in the community in a variety of settings over a period of time. It was noted that this engagement would continue with a further event planned for residents on the 20th March 2026.

The Chair thanked Officers for their report and advised that updates would be provided at a later date.

Decision

- i) Members agreed to endorse Here for You as Hartlepool's cohesion strategy.
- ii) Members agreed to champion the principles and themes of the cohesion strategy.
- iii) Members acknowledged and noted that there is further work to do and that this strategy cannot sit alone to have an impact on some of the risks and challenges communities are facing.

11. Review of memorial benches and consideration of guidelines for temporary memorials - *Director of Housing, Growth and Communities*

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To agree an approach to the siting of memorial benches around the borough, and more widely consider how memorials and tributes are managed.

Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee

The Director of Housing, Growth and Communities presented to the committee work that had taken place around this matter, acknowledging that this was a sensitive subject requiring careful management.

Members were advised that a strategic approach would be taken in managing memorial bench overcrowding and maintenance issues, when benches fall into disrepair. A review of the location of memorial benches had been undertaken with section 3.3 of the report outlining the data from this. It was highlighted that there were no detailed records relating to the ownership of benches already installed. Therefore, it was not possible to contact the owner of the bench to remind them of their obligation to look after it.

The proposals for managing the issues identified were detailed in section 4 of the report. Members noted that this would involve attaching notices to memorial benches that were in serious disrepair. This notice would outline that the bench would be removed after a period of time unless brought up to an agreed standard. Alternative memorial options to benches were also being explored including memory trees and tree planting.

The Director also discussed a connected issue regarding temporary memorials where tragic accidents and incidents had occurred. Given the review that had been undertaken, it was considered that this would be an opportunity to develop a policy that would help the council manage such matters on council owned land in the future.

In the discussion that followed a Member raised the issue of the financial pressure on families and loved ones in restoring the benches. It was asked if the work to restore the benches could be funded by the council, if needed, with a payment plan set up for families to pay this back over a period of time. The Director advised this option could potentially be explored. It was also noted that each case would be looked at on an individual basis.

Moving to the management of temporary memorial sites, the Director explained that the policy to manage such sites may also include a time limit of how long they could remain in place before being removed. The impact on the environment in leaving memorial items at temporary sites was also discussed.

Reiterating that the management of memorial benches was a sensitive subject, the Director confirmed that owners would be given notice period to address the issue, and that if the bench was removed the plaque would be retained for a period of time

for the family to collect. Options for recycling and restoring the benches were detailed in the report. In terms of memorial events that were being held it was advised that alternative options to this could be explored, along with wider communications on the council policy regarding the use of the release of balloons and lanterns.

A resident raised the issue of benches in parks, it was advised that, if following a review, the benches were in good condition and provided seating options in parks this would be taken into consideration. Involving local groups such as Men's Shed in the maintenance of benches would also be a consideration.

The terms and conditions of the application for a memorial seat were discussed, the Director advised that future applications for benches would be carefully managed and other options alongside this would also be considered and promoted.

Decision

- i) In light of the audit that has been completed Members -
 - a) Agreed to the removal of any benches which are in a state of disrepair and offer these back to the owners, along with the plaques as outlined in para 4.1.
 - b) Approved the new draft agreement, provided in appendix 3 of the report, for the installation of any future benches or other memorials (this could include celebratory events) that are installed.
 - c) Agreed to officers investigating alternative options to benches to allow individuals to celebrate life events and loved ones.
 - d) Approved the development of a policy regarding the establishment, management and removal of temporary memorials.

12. Conservation Area Advisory Committee – *Director of Housing, Growth and Communities*

Type of decision

For Information

Purpose of report

To provide details on the Conservation Area Advisory Committee which has recently started to meet again. It provides information on the background of the group and the proposed work plan for future months, outlined in appendix 1 of the report.

Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee

The Director of Housing, Growth and Communities advised Members that, during an Adults and Community Based Services Committee meeting in March 2025, it was proposed that a Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC) be introduced. This

would provide those scrutinising conservation issues with independent member comments.

Members noted that the background to the CAAC was detailed within the report, including the terms of reference and remit of the committee. During the first meeting discussion topics were considered with a programme for further meetings developed from this. Information and communication to residents was also considered.

It was noted that the Chair of the CAAC was Councillor Karen Oliver. The proposed work plan was detailed in the report, with contributions from future speakers such as Historic England forming part of this.

The Head of Service (Heritage and Open Spaces) advised that the CAAC would encompass broad policy issues, with a holistic approach being taken to items brought to committee. This would include advice to owners and residents on works to their properties as part of the 'whole house' approach.

The Chair confirmed that the intention was to create a group that could have an impact. Members of the Planning committee were aware that the CAAC had begun to meet. In terms of engagement and involvement there were proposals for providing clear advice to the public in conservation matters including linking with local estate agents. The Chair outlined a balance between the benefits of heritage to the town whilst recognising the expense of modifications to homes within a conservation area.

A Member suggested that a list of tradesmen that were skilled in carrying out work to homes within conservation areas could be compiled to help residents.

A question was raised regarding the change of usage of homes to holiday lets, it was advised this was not part of the CAAC remit and wouldn't necessarily impact on a conservation area unless it included changes to the frontage of buildings within a conservation area.

Decision

- i) The committee noted the report for information.

13. Any other business which the Chairman considers urgent

A Member raised concerns regarding the poor condition of benches at a bus stop in Seaton, located near to the clock tower. The Director for Housing, Growth and Communities advised this matter would be investigated further.

The meeting concluded at: 6.10pm

H MARTIN

DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES

PUBLICATION DATE: 19 March 2026