

Re-opening Stockport Central Library and transparency about any future closure plans

~~This council meeting notes:~~

- ~~• that Stockport Central Library is currently closed due to COVID and the need for social distancing; and~~
- ~~• the mixed messages coming from the Cabinet regarding whether there are plans for this closure to become permanent, arising from the recent consultation on opening the One Stockport Hub in Merseyway.~~

This council meeting **further** notes that the much-loved Stockport Central Library:

- **is currently closed due to COVID and the need for social distancing;**
- was built during 1913 and 1914, following a Carnegie endowment totalling £15,000, equivalent to over £1.2m today;
- this amount was 50% higher than the original offer, following a design submission by Bradshaw, Gass and Hope in Bolton that the Carnegie Assessor determined was worthy of a “premium”, subject to Stockport funding and building a branch library elsewhere in the town for £2,000 (£161k today); and
- the building was given Grade II listing in April 2017 as “a good example of civic architecture”, with “a strong, well-proportioned composition”, “a mature example of free-Classicism”, and “as a good example of a Carnegie library” with a “prominent contribution to the streetscape, and group-value with other listed civic buildings in close proximity”.

~~This council meeting further notes:~~

- ~~• the extraordinary circumstances created by the covid-19 pandemic that has seen library and book usage fall to 15% of pre covid demand and PC usage to 23%;~~
- ~~• the widespread operational challenges in delivering services in a covid secure manner, which has resulted in 11 fte library staff being redeployed to the contact centre to manage Test and Trace calls and library calls and emails;~~
- ~~• that recruitment is currently underway for a number of vacant library posts; and~~
- ~~• the prior acknowledgement of the outstanding job our front line and key workers have done to deliver services in such difficult circumstances~~

~~This council further recognises:~~

- ~~• the council’s commitment to not close a single library over the past decade despite having to make over £120 million worth of budget reductions;~~
- ~~• this administration’s commitment to maintaining libraries services; and~~
- ~~• the council’s ambitions to align public service provision within economic regeneration~~

~~This council meeting welcomes recent clarification that there are no current plans to permanently cease library services from the Central Library, but notes no long term assurance has been given about possible future use of this important site and shares residents’ concerns that the library may not re-open.~~

~~Notwithstanding the warm words said about the architectural importance of the building by the Cabinet, and accepting that provision may need to be interrupted at present due to COVID, this council meeting believes that a commitment is needed for the provision of publically-accessible library services to continue in our Central Library unless and until any alternative plans are made public and there has been a proper and transparent public consultation.~~

This council meeting therefore resolves:

- ~~• to re-open Stockport Central Library as soon as social distancing restrictions have been removed; and~~
- not to permanently close or remove library services from Stockport Central Library unless and until there has been a proper public consultation that makes this intention clear and sets out the alternative plans for **both the library services and** the building so that Stockport residents can have their say.

Moved by: Cllr Kate Butler

Seconded by: Cllr David Meller

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