

EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF MEMBERS OF THE ECONOMY & REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 30 June 2021
At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Oliver Johnstone (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Colin MacAlister (Vice-Chair); Councillors Grace Baynham, Kate Butler, Becky Crawford, Roy Driver, Steve Gribbon and Mike Hurleston.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors and officers were invited to declare any interests they had in any of the items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations of interest were made.

2. FUTURE HIGH STREET FUND (MERSEYWAY) - ENGAGEMENT MATERIALS

Representatives from consultants The Best Communications made a presentation on the materials to be used in the engagement on the proposals for Stockroom in Merseyway.

The Cabinet Member for Citizen Focus and Engagement (Councillor David Sedgwick) attended the meeting to respond to Members' questions.

This Extraordinary Meeting had been requested by Members of the Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee but, at the request of the Chair, Members of the Corporate, Resource Management and Governance Scrutiny Committee had also been invited to the meeting to contribute their views and comments.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- A Member enquired what output was expected from the engagement in terms of the number of responses and the age range of the people who responded to the consultation. It was hoped that there would be a minimum of 1,000 responses based on the response rate to similar projects undertaken by the consultants elsewhere. More in depth responses were possibly more important than the total number of responses.
- There was no direct comparison with Storyhouse in Chester which had a theatre, cinema and library based together. There were no proposals for an adjoining theatre and cinema in Stockport, but consideration was being given to using the space for performances/events.
- The distinction between the engagement part of the process and the consultation part was explained, with the purpose of the engagement part of the process being to gather a variety of views with the use of 'open' questions.
- A Frequently Asked Questions sheet would be provided as part of the engagement materials.

- The Council would be considering a range of options to try and elicit the views of those people who were not computer literate.
- A Member enquired how much the process was costing the Council.
- The recommendation of the Corporate, Resource Management and Governance Scrutiny Committee was reiterated, namely that questions in the engagement with regard to support for a 21st Century library in Merseyway and closing the Central Library as a library service should not be de-coupled. The view was expressed that this was necessary to obtain a true reflection of the public's views.
- If the library service was moved to Merseyway, there could potentially be a loss of service in terms of the range and number of books provided.
- A Member felt that the engagement materials should be explicit about the possibility of moving other services to Merseyway. There may be implications for businesses and also the provision of car parking in the town centre. The Cabinet Member clarified that there were no plans to move the Art Gallery from its current location. Support was given to moving the apprenticeship shop to Merseyway.
- It was unclear from the engagement materials whether the Council had a fixed idea about what should be included in Stockroom, for example whether a café should be included, and which parts of the proposals were dependent on the Future High Street funding.
- It was important that the Council worked with partners such as Stockport Homes to make as many residents as possible aware of the engagement. Work would also take place with Totally Stockport to try and ensure that as many businesses as possible responded to the engagement.
- A Member requested to see the outcome of a staff survey of library employees to ascertain their views on the proposals.
- A Member felt that the engagement document should be more 'eye catching', particularly with regard to its cover.
- Greater clarity and transparency was required in the engagement materials, and particularly the pre-amble which needed to spell out the effect on the Central Library of opening a library in Merseyway.
- There should be a question in the engagement materials to gauge the public's views with regard to whereabouts in Merseyway it was proposed that Stockroom would be located.
- There was a risk that the Future High Street funding would be taken away if the library in Merseyway was not built.
- The possible effect on the Plaza and the Garrick Theatre of a performance/event space in Merseyway needed to be considered, as well as the possible effect of a café on local retailers.
- The project was in its very early days. Information on access to Stockroom with the identification of bus stops, disabled parking, lift facilities etc would be included at a later date, should the scheme go ahead.

The Corporate Director advised the meeting that the final version of the engagement materials would be agreed with the portfolio holders and an electronic copy then provided to Members of the Scrutiny Committee. A further extraordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be arranged in August to consider the response to the engagement on the proposals.

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RESOLVED – That the presentation on the materials to be used in the engagement on the proposals for Stockroom in Merseyway be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.35 pm