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## **EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF MEMBERS OF THE CENTRAL STOCKPORT AREA COMMITTEE**

Meeting: 17 November 2021  
At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Kerry Waters (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Laura Clingan (Vice-Chair); Councillors Sheila Bailey, Becky Crawford, Dickie Davies, Philip Harding, Amanda Peers, Andy Sorton, Charlie Stewart, Wendy Wild and Matt Wynne.

### **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.

The following interests were declared:-

#### **Personal Interests**

##### **Councillor**

Andy Sorton	Agenda items 3 'Open Forum- Stockport United Against Austerity' and 4 ' Future High Street Fund - Stockroom' as his partner works for the Stockport Libraries' service.
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### **2. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

Members of the public were invited to put questions to the Chair of the Area Committee on any matters within the powers and duties of the Area Committee, subject to the exclusions set out in the Code of Practice.

No public questions were submitted.

### **3. OPEN FORUM - STOCKPORT UNITED AGAINST AUSTERITY**

In accordance with paragraph 2(b) of the Code of Practice on Area Committee and Ward Committee - Open Forums in the Constitution, representatives of the Save Stockport's Historic Central Library campaign (John Pearson, Deborah Hind and Phillip Welldrake), which was organised by Stockport United Against Austerity, addressed the Area Committee regarding Stockport's Future High Street Fund project, Stockroom, the proposed transfer of library services from the Central Library building to Stockroom and the recent consultation which had been undertaken.

The following comments were made/issues raised by the representatives of Stockport United Against Austerity:-

- The creation of public libraries in the country offered more than just the books and other materials in their buildings. They were welcoming places to be and were, for example, especially beneficial to elderly people. They were a social entitlement.
- There were a lot of benefits to having a purpose built central library as a public, civic building. The Central Library building was a Grade 2 Listed Building which was of local and national architectural importance.
- The Central Library building could be adapted and form part of a Civic Quarter with the Town Hall nearby. There had been an impressive refurbishment of Central Library buildings in other parts of the country. The Central Library was also accessible in terms of its proximity to the railway station, the new Stockport Interchange and a bus stop for the 192 bus service.
- The Stockport Heritage Trust had suggested having the entrance to the Central Library at the rear of the building and this was an option which could be considered.
- The Merseyway Precinct had been designed for shops. Stockport United Against Austerity felt that the proposals had materialised because of the Council's concerns about the number of empty retail units in the Merseyway Precinct.
- The majority of people who had responded to the consultation were opposed to the transfer of library services from the Central Library building to Stockroom. This reflected the petition organised by Stockport United Against Austerity which had been signed by in excess of 7,000 people opposed to the transfer.
- People had found the phased nature of the engagement and consultation process difficult to understand.
- Despite the Council's undertaking to return library services to the Central Library building once the Covid-19 pandemic permitted, many of the library services had not been returned to the Central Library building and were still in the One Stockport Hub building in the former Argos Store in the Merseyway Precinct.
- The needs of the library service for older people and disabled people had not been properly represented in the report.
- There wouldn't be full public access to the Central Library building if library services weren't provided there.
- Stockport United Against Austerity referred to a report from CIPFA which indicated that the Council had accessed a comparatively low level of funds to support library services.
- There had been a reduction in the opening hours of libraries in Stockport and an increase in the number of hours where the libraries were unstaffed. The latter had caused possible security concerns.
- Merseyway Precinct was not part of the Council's civic estate and there would be a payment to facilities management if the library service was in Stockroom.

The following comments were made/issues raised by Members of the Area Committee:-

- The Council's proposals were about taking the social entitlement identified by Stockport United Against Austerity and ensuring that it was built upon for the future. The Council's aim was to maintain library services at a time when there was a decline in people using the service.
- The library service was vulnerable in its current location and change was required to preserve the service.

- Stockport's library service was valued and this would continue irrespective of which building it was in. A distinction needed to be made between the services provided and the building they were provided in.
- Comparisons with the refurbishment of other central libraries were not realistic. With regard to the refurbishment of Kendal Library, the population of Kendal was about 12,000 and the population of Stockport was about 234,600.
- The Central Library was restricted by its floorspace which was 12,000 square feet. Only 6% of books could be displayed at any one time.
- Stockroom offered a significantly larger area with a floorspace of 43,000 square feet with enough space for a performance area, an events area, a sensory room and enhanced toilet provision. All these facilities could be accessed by people who used the library.
- The Stockroom proposal contained enhanced provision for children.
- No libraries had closed in the borough since the Government austerity measures introduced in 2010. This contrasted with other areas such as Bury where a significant proportion of local libraries had been closed.
- Stockroom would allow those who lived in the vicinity of the town centre to have new facilities in their own neighbourhood.

RESOLVED – That the presentations by the representatives of Stockport United Against Austerity be noted.

#### **4. FUTURE HIGH STREET FUND - STOCKROOM**

Consideration was given to a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on progress with Stockport's High Street Fund project, Stockroom, and updating Members on the recent consultation which had been undertaken.

The Cabinet Members for Citizen Focus & Engagement (Councillor David Sedgwick) and Economy & Regeneration (Councillor David Meller) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Area Committee.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- There had been a decline in the usage of the Central Library over the last ten years and attempts had been made to turn this around.
- Libraries should also be aimed at young children, not all of whom were academic and who had different ways of working.
- Young people were now growing up with technology and there had to be new and innovative learning environments for young people.
- The library building needed to be fit for purpose to enable the service to be inclusive.
- Libraries should be open to all people, including asylum seekers.
- The proposed component parts of Stockroom, as set out in paragraph 5.6 of the report, were to be commended.
- Stockport needed a first class library service that was free and open to all. Since the Central Library was built in Stockport, another sixteen libraries had been built in the borough. Stockport was a different place to the one that existed when the Central

Library was built and if was being built today it would be built in a different location in the town centre.

- The Council should not ignore the opportunity afforded by the successful Future High Street Fund bid.
- It was possible to respect Stockport's heritage and see the opportunities presented by Stockroom as the way forward for Stockport. The Council had given a firm commitment that the historic Central Library building would be preserved.
- Studies had shown that when libraries were included in shopping precincts, their usage increased.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.37 pm