

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF DISTRICT CENTRES POST COVID-19 PANDEMIC **SCOPING REPORT**

Report of Director of Development and Regeneration

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 This report outlines the proposed scope and brief for reviewing District Centres post Covid-19 Pandemic.

2. Background to the selection of this topic

- 2.1 The Council's commitment to the sustainability and vitality of its District Centres is of fundamental importance to the Borough as a whole and to the Council's ability to address the needs and aspirations of local residents. The Borough's District Centres do, however, face a number of opportunities and challenges which require a new kind of response from the Council. The Council's overall approach to help create strong, vibrant District Centres was shaped by a joint Communities & Housing and Economy & Regeneration Scrutiny Review into District Centres back in 2018/19.
- 2.2 As each of our District Centres has its own unique characteristics as well as its own strengths and challenges the Scrutiny Review identified the need to deliver bespoke place-based interventions that can ensure each District Centre can fully serve its local residents. To assist with this the Council began working in partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University's Institute for Place Management (IPM) who are internationally recognised leaders in the field of coordinated, multi-stakeholder approaches to improving places. The first phase of this work involved a high-level assessment of each district centre based on the 25 key factors within IPM's High Street 2020 report.
- 2.3 The high-level assessment identified strengths and weaknesses in each of the district centres and proposed a range of activities that have the ability to make a positive impact on each centre. The full report from Phase 1, shared with Area Committees in early 2020, is included as Appendix A.
- 2.4 Building on the Phase 1 work Phase 2 work commenced in early 2020 and involved the installation of footfall counters in the 8 district centres, however, due to the pandemic the remaining elements of Phase 2 were put on hold.

3. Dedicated District Centre Staff Support Capacity

- 3.1 Following the Phase 1 work with IPM it became apparent the complexity of identifying appropriate solutions for each district centre and delivering tangible improvements in complex multi-stakeholder environments would require

dedicated capacity within the Council to coordinate and facilitate the work, provide leadership and accountability, and act as the main point of contact for stakeholders within each centre.

- 3.2 Funding has now been secured from within existing budgets to support two new District Centre Manager posts. Richard Daniels and Darren Flannery who took up their new roles last month, sit in the Development & Regeneration Team and along with liaising with local businesses and organisations, will work in partnership with colleagues from across the Council including the Neighbourhoods Team, Highways, Planning and the Economy, Work & Skills Team. We see these roles being particularly important in light of a changing context for retail and public service provision following the challenges of the previous two years.

- Richard Daniels – oversees Edgeley, Hazel Grove, Romiley and Marple
- Darren Flannery – oversees Bramhall, Cheadle, Cheadle Hulme and Reddish

- 3.3 The role involves supporting local retailers including helping them to access business support, supporting local organisations and co-ordinating, supporting and/or delivering events and local initiatives together with initiating projects which stimulate the local economy and support local communities. They will provide leadership and management and will work closely with partner organisations.

4. Institute of Place Management - Phase 2

- 4.1 Following the easing of restrictions it now feels an appropriate time to recommence with Phase 2 activities in partnership with IPM. Also an opportune time given district centres play a major role in the delivery of a number of the Council's key priorities including the emerging Local Plan, current and future transport investment, school's capacity, and health and social care integration.

- 4.2 The activities to be delivered as part of Phase 2 are as follows:

- a) A workshop to take place in each of the 8 district centres, which will bring together local stakeholders and ensure a wide range of input into recommendations produced (scheduled to take place in March 2022 – dates provided in Appendix 2).

A variety of stakeholders who play an important part in ensuring District Centres are vibrant will be invited to the workshop including retailers, key employers, leisure providers, landowners, community groups, and residents.

- b) An individual action plan for each of the 8 district centres, to improve their vitality and viability (end of May 2022) – these plans will include quick wins along with longer term actions to work towards.

- c) A dashboard to measure the impact of interventions, over short, medium and longer-term.

- d) An activity-based classification of 8 district centres based on data provided by Springboard footfall counting technology

5. The new Stockport Economic Plan

- 5.1 The One Stockport Borough Plan places a thriving economy at the heart of our ambition for the future of Stockport and includes two key economic related priorities:
- An enterprising and thriving Stockport
 - A skilled and confident Stockport
- 5.2 In order to take forward Stockport's ambition, reflecting the potential for the local economy around these priorities, and to contribute to other priorities, such as 'Digital Stockport', work has been undertaken in partnership with key stakeholders to develop an Economic Plan for Stockport.
- 5.3 As a supporting delivery plan to the One Stockport Borough Plan, the Economic Plan will play a vital role in setting out how the priorities of the Borough Plan will be achieved and will also inform the development of the Local Plan by identifying the key economic priorities for the borough. The Plan will also be an integral part of the Borough's collective response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic challenges that has and continues to present. By its nature, the Plan will be a live document and will be reviewed regularly to respond to the changing economic landscape.
- 5.4 There is a clear link to the importance of the Economic Plan for the District Centres and the relevance of the Centres in contributing to delivering the actions identified in the Plan.
- 5.5 The work to produce the Economic Plan has reached an important stage of agreeing the relevant priorities and formulating the actions to deliver changes and improvements to benefit Stockport's economy and realise the ambition set out in the One Stockport Borough Plan.
- 5.6 This Scrutiny Review is timely for reviewing how well the Economic Plan joins up with the needs of our District Centres and supports their growth and development.
- 5.7 The Chair has also suggested that part of this theme should look at changes in use classes in the District Centres since the start of the pandemic to help the panel identify how they are changing. Officers will provide further detail on this for the first meeting of the panel.

6. What would be the scope of the Scrutiny Review of this topic?

- 6.1 As the pandemic has shown, our district centres are incredibly important centres and lifelines for our communities. Local residents have shown a strong desire not only to support one another but to support local retailers, hospitality and leisure businesses all of which assist in creating strong viable centres.

- 6.2 It is therefore recommended that the Scrutiny Review of District Centres Post Covid-19 Pandemic focuses on:
- i. Reviewing the scope of Phase 2 to be delivered in partnership with IPM and detailed in section 4.2 – any specific areas to focus on.
 - ii. Seeking views from Members on the roles and responsibilities of the 2 new District Centre Managers – emerging priority work areas
 - iii. Relevance of the emerging Stockport Economic Plan in creating vibrant and thriving District Centres.

7. Proposed Meeting Structure

Members are asked to consider and agree future meeting dates.

Proposed meetings:

Meeting 1 (14th February 2022) – Scope the Review

Verbal update on review progress from panel members to the Economy & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee (3 March 2022).

Meeting 2 (14 March 2022) – Evidence-gathering

Meeting 3 (14 April 2022) – Look to agree final report and recommendations in April 2022.

It is expected that the panel will conclude the work for their review by the end of the municipal year 2022. During the review, panel members will formulate a number of recommendations that will go on to be considered by the Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee, and thereafter, the Cabinet.

Anyone requiring further information should contact:

District Centre IPM Phase 2 – Helen Walters, Town Centre Manager, tel 07800 618140 email helen.walters@stockport.gov.uk

Stockport Economic Plan – Richard Mortimer, Head of Economy Work & Skills, tel. 07800 617932 email richard.mortimer@stockport.gov.uk

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Stockport Council Joint Scrutiny Review into Vital and Viable District Centres - Institute for Place Management - Phase 1 Report

Appendix 2: Dates for District Centre Workshops to be delivered in partnership with Institute Place Management

Appendix 3: Stakeholder Workshop presentation on the latest position of the Stockport Economic Plan.