

COMMUNITIES & TRANSPORT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 9 October 2023

At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Matt Wynne (Vice-Chair) in the Chair; Councillors Geoff Abell, Dickie Davies, Steve Gibbon, Yvonne Guariento, Dominic Hardwick, Tom Morrison, David Wilson and Rachel Wise.

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 4 September 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

However, it was noted that, in relation to Agenda Item 5 – ‘Interchange Park Update’, following the meeting on 4 September 2023, the Director of Place Management had corrected the record to state that CCTV had been designed into the security arrangements for the park.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

The following interests were declared:-

Personal Interest

Councillor

Interest

Dominic Hardwick	Agenda Item 7 – ‘Annual Report – Armed Forces Covenant 2023’ – as an associate member of the Royal Naval Association, Hazel Grove and as a regular attendee at Norbury Parish Church, also known as St Thomas, Hazel Grove.
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3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. UPDATE ON LIFE LEISURE CRECHE PROVISION

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the provision of creches by Life Leisure across their leisure facilities across the Borough.

The Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture & Sport (Councillor Frankie Singleton) attended the meeting to respond to councillors’ questions.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- In relation to the creche provision at the Life Leisure centre in Cheadle, it was reported that it was run by an independent operator. Furthermore, it was stated that the creche was struggling to be financially viable, even with the benefit of free space.
- Clarification was given about the different Life Leisure membership packages, with an all-inclusive package allowing users to access Life Leisure sites across the borough.
- Members commented that the cost of providing creche facilities was prohibitive and, in the circumstances, could understand why they were not provided at Life Leisure. It was agreed that the delivery of fitness was the primary function of Life Leisure.
- Members requested that, should the costs of childcare become cheaper in the future, the provision of creche facilities at Life Leisure should be revisited.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

5. RESPONDING TO OUR MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture & Sport and Cabinet Member for Parks, Highways & Transport Services submitted a joint report (copies of which had been circulated) outlining a strategic approach in responding to the review of the medium-term financial plan. This report was read in conjunction with the Medium Term Financial Plan update report (both parts A and B) presented to Cabinet meeting on 19 September 2023.

The appendix to the report outlined the budget proposals being considered by the Cabinet to address financial and demand challenges, enable longer term transformation, and ensure the delivery of shared strategic partnership ambitions.

The Cabinet Member for Parks, Highways & Transport Services (Councillor Grace Baynham) and the Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture & Sport (Councillor Frankie Singleton) attended the meeting to respond to councillors' questions.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- The council libraries' roll-out of Open+ provisions was seen as a good alternative to closing facilities. The Open+ pilot was reported to have been a success to date, although it had not yet concluded.
- Concerns were expressed about staff shortages at Stockport's libraries. Reddish library was cited as a particular example of staff shortages and with scaffolding up at the building, the facility was not easily accessible and not obviously open to the public. It was suggested that a banner could be displayed at the library to state it was still open.
- Members queried the proposal to start charging at carparks which were currently free. Specifically, what the cost would be, whether there would be any notice period or a public consultation. In response it was stated that this proposal was at an early stage. It was not the council's intention to charge at every carpark which was currently free. Rather, the proposal was to look at where charging anomalies existed. Proposals for specific car parks to move from free to paid would be brought before this Committee.
- In response to a query about the potential use of contactless card payments for council car parks, it was stated that parking can be paid for by way of cash or an app; there was little demand for card payments and installing machines which had the capacity to

take such payments would not be cost effective. Members requested a report on this proposal for a future meeting of this Committee.

- Members noted that charges for bereavement services were due to increase and queried whether hardship funds would be available for those who would struggle to pay for bereavement services. In response it was reported that there would be provision for assistance with bereavement service costs. Furthermore blanket cost increases were not part of the proposal and cheaper options would remain available.
- Members queried whether there was any potential for a reduction in Stockport Council staff.
- It was reported that a tried and tested approach was in place for any redundancies within the council staff which included early communication with staff, consultations and aiming to secure voluntary rather than compulsory redundancies. Trades Unions were also consulted.
- Members commented on the proposal to reduce the capacity within the team looking at funding bids for walking and cycling schemes. It was hoped that this would return in the future.
- Members also commented on the proposed reduction of staff in the area of sustainable transport delivery and commented that this was a key strategy for the Borough. Members requested further information on the detailed implications of this decision.
- It was confirmed that the council would be looking at making savings of £10.8 million in the year 2024/25. Successive Chancellors had cut £133 million from Stockport Council's budget and in making savings it would endeavour to keep the impact to a minimum.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

6. GREEK STREET AND STOCKHOLM BRIDGES

The Director of Place Management submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out that both Greek Street Bridge and Stockholm Road Bridge had been identified by Network Rail as needing replacement due to the deteriorating condition of the structures. It also set out the work undertaken to date to develop the design for the replacement bridges; a summary overview of highway network considerations following the closure of the bridge during Network Rail's bridge renewal and replacement works; and a proposed way forward and timescales for the works.

The Cabinet Member for Parks, Highways & Transportation Services (Councillor Grace Baynham) attended the meeting to respond to councillors' questions.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Members were supportive of the proposal within the scheme to futureproof the site for a possible future tram or train connection.
- It was noted that the Greek Street Bridge site benefitted from additional resources including Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) funding for improved walking and cycling access.
- The replacement at Stockholm Bridge did not include additional cycling and walking resources. However, the new design was intended to be wider than the current bridge, feature footpaths on both sides and new parapets.

- Members commented that the issue of road safety in relation to the bridges was a matter for the Council to be concerned with, whilst Network Rail would be concerned with the bridges.
- Members requested that residents should be given the opportunity to have their say on the aesthetic of the new Stockholm Bridge. Members also referred to Network Rail's community teams and its funding pots for creating and maintaining street art/murals on bridges.
- It was confirmed that the new bridge was currently being modelled and that local councillors and residents would be part of the consultation process.
- It was suggested that whilst these works are being carried out, traffic diversions should take account of cyclists and pedestrians as well as motorists.
- Members commented on the lack of signage for HGVs at Stockholm Bridge and requested clearer signage. In response it was stated that signage would be considered.
- Members requested that the mosaics on the Greek Street Bridge should be preserved and moved. It was reported that Northern Rail had been asked for a clear commitment to preserve or replace those mosaics.
- The significance of these civil engineering projects was commented upon, with a particular emphasis on the implications including the disruption which is likely to be caused whilst this work was ongoing. This would include implications for traffic management, local businesses and match days at Stockport County FC. Members requested that they be kept updated about these schemes.
- In response it was stated that the Council had not underestimated the disruption to the whole borough, in particular Edgeley, during the course of these works. Plans for traffic diversions would be reported to this Committee prior to any work commencing. It was further reported that representatives from Network Rail would attend future meetings of this Committee as well as Member briefings.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That it be noted that the report would also be submitted to Central Stockport Area Committee for consideration.

7. THIRD ANNUAL FLOOD RESILIENCE REPORT AND HIGHWAY DRAINAGE ASSET MANAGEMENT UPDATE

The Director of Place Management submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) which provided an update to the Council's Annual Flood Resilience Plan.

In April 2021, the first Stockport Council Annual Flood Resilience Plan was produced. It described the various roles and responsibilities of the Council with regard to flooding and flood resilience including its roles as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA), Highway Authority (HA) and landowner both of greenspace and working with Stockport Homes with its significant housing assets. The work in this area supported the council's overall approach to climate change via Stockport Climate Action Now (CAN) strategy. The second report of September 2022 provided an update on activities since April 2021 and this update continued that process.

The Cabinet Member for Parks, Highways & Transport Services (Councillor Grace Baynam) attended the meeting to respond to councillors' questions.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- It was noted that approximately half of the areas mentioned in the report were in Cheadle and Members queried what protective measures had been put into place.
- In response it was stated that, whilst a number of schemes were in place, there was a limit to measures the council was able to undertake due to climate change. There had been six or seven flooding incidents in Stockport due to rain, flash floods and storms. Attempts were being made to capture water upstream because water captured downstream had a negative impact on lower ground.
- The report set out a number of small schemes such as those in Lower Fold, Marple, and Romiley. Those areas had been identified as ones in which specific localised action would not negatively impact upon the next community. The Council did not have the funding to ensure that everyone would be safe from flooding and more flooding in Stockport was predicted.
- It was reported that a flow meter had been placed at Ladybrook to measure water flow, however monitoring data was not yet available. It was also reported that flooding at Lyme Park flowed down toward Bramhall via Poynton Brook. At Lyme Park, leaky dams had been added whereby logs were placed across fields and streams to create ponds to hold back water at the source area. It was also reported that, during periods of flooding in Bramhall, pipes fill up and cannot flow into the river because it was already full. Consequently water backed up into the highway system and came back out of the grids. This created to a very complex area of flood prevention work for which more data was needed.
- Members asked about the council's approach to planning applications, the majority of which required LLFA interventions to seek alternative arrangements to include more sustainability in the areas of water drainage and sewage.
- It was reported that developers were regularly reminded about their obligation to retain water and not allow run-off into drains. Developers were encouraged to do more to prevent flooding as part of the planning negotiations. Furthermore, homeowners were encouraged to consider the impact of concrete driveways and dropped kerbs on water flow. The council followed the current Government policy on rules and standards in terms of planning regulations.
- In relation to the A555 it was not possible to say that this road would not flood in winter, however it was able to withstand more rain than it had two years ago due to better tanks, bigger ponds and stronger pumps. Furthermore, the council had more knowledge about flooding on the A555 and was, at times, able to intervene, but was not able to guarantee that it would not flood.
- It was reported that many of the culverts in the borough dated back to the 17th Century. The council was working with local residents to help prevent flooding in gardens.
- In response to a question about Stockport's reservoirs, it was reported that a dam had burst in Whaley Bridge in 2019 and, following that incident, action plans had been created to deal rapidly with the possibility of a similar situation arising. It was also reported that reservoir inspectors, independent from the Local Authority, inspected both the action plans and reservoirs. Furthermore, as a Local Authority, Stockport Council had a responsibility to ensure that its reservoirs were kept in a safe condition
- In relation to gully cleaning it was reported that the entire borough was included in a three-year gully cleaning cycle. Some areas which experienced pockets of flooding had received more regular cleaning which was undertaken on an assessment of need

rather than by area. Members were encouraged to report areas which required clearing.

- It was agreed that a report on flooding at Alexandra Park would be brought to Central Area Committee and more generally Area Committees would receive reports on local flooding in their areas.

RESOLVED – (1) That the work undertaken to improve flood resilience in Stockport be noted.

(2) That the continued partnership working and investment in this area be supported.

8. ANNUAL REPORT - ARMED FORCES COVENANT 2023

The Assistant Director – Legal & Democratic Governance submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) which outlined the purpose of the Armed Forces Covenant and provided an overview of key achievements against the identified priorities during 2022-2023; the second year of the three-year programme of priorities. The report also provided an update on The Armed Forces Act 2021 which had been introduced as a new requirement for some public bodies, including local authorities.

The Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture & Sport (Councillor Frankie Singleton) attended the meeting to respond to councillors' questions.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Members endorsed the content of the report and referred to a number of recent events involving the armed forces including Remembrance Sunday and the anniversary of bombing of the Droppin Well pub. Members commented favourably on the work of the council with affected families.
- Members requested that council officers and community groups be publicly thanked.
- Members also gave their congratulations to the armed forces' celebration of the SS Stockport, along with the exhibition. During World War II Stockport Council had sponsored five ships; the names of which were HMS Mignonette, HMS Hawkins, HMS Maple, HMS Fly and HMS Barbour. As Stockport's adoption of those ships contributed to the war effort, a request was made for research into this important part of Stockport's history.
- It was noted that the covenant was an important piece of legislation in relation to homeless veterans and that there were good support links throughout the Greater Manchester area for homeless veterans. The links between membership of the armed forces, neurodivergence and homelessness was noted and the work that Disability Stockport undertook with veterans was welcomed. Members asked about the effectiveness of the council's partnership approach to housing and otherwise supporting veterans.
- In response it was reported that the Armed Forces Covenant Steering Group included Stockport Homes and that there had been changes to the membership of the group, with the inclusion of the Department for Work and Pensions along with an increase in membership from the voluntary sector including Project Recce, Mode Rehabilitation and Disability Stockport. Ex and current armed forces personnel had welcomed these additions and acknowledged the importance of building those relationships, particularly

with regard to employment. It was also reported that armed forces veterans were part of the council's guaranteed assessment criteria in applying for roles.

- The importance of the voluntary sector incorporating the Stockport Armed Forces Community Organisation (SAFCO) and its benefits for Stockport was highlighted.
- It was further reported that updates to membership of the covenant were underway. There was an annual change to the Chair and the Armed Forces Covenant was seeking cross-party representation for its Steering Group.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

9. AGENDA PLANNING

A representative of the Assistant Director - Legal & Democratic Governance (Monitoring Officer) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out the planned agenda items for the Scrutiny Committee's next meeting and any Forward Plan items.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Assistant Director for Legal & Democratic Governance (Monitoring Officer) be recommended to programme the following items into the Scrutiny Committee's work programme for the 2023/24 Municipal Year: Communities & Transport Scrutiny Committee

- Interchange park: security and CCTV
- Autism partnership
- Fly tipping enforcement
- Library fines
- Pay and display car parks: contactless payment feasibility.

The meeting closed at 7.55 pm