

COMMUNITIES & TRANSPORT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 20 November 2023

At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Joe Barratt (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Matt Wynne (Vice-Chair); Councillors Geoff Abell, Steve Gribbon, Yvonne Guariento, Dominic Hardwick, Hibbert, Rachel Wise and Shan Alexander.

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 9 October 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

Helen Hibbert	Agenda Item 4 – ‘Responding to our Medium Term Financial Plan’ and Agenda Item 5 – ‘2023/24 Mid Year (Quarter 2) Portfolio Performance and Resources Reports: Communities, Culture & Sport and Parks, Highways & Transport Services’ as she was working under a contract for Network Rail.
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Officers

Mark Glynn	Agenda Item 5 – ‘2023/24 Mid Year (Quarter 2) Portfolio Performance and Resources Reports: Communities, Culture & Sport and Parks, Highways & Transport Services’ as Chair of the Totally Local Company (TLC) Board.
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3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. RESPONDING TO OUR MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture & Sport and the Cabinet Member for Parks, Highways & Transport Services submitted a joint report (copies of which had been circulated) providing further detail on the budget change proposals, taking into consideration the feedback received to date.

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:-

Library Services

- Members thanked portfolio holders for arranging for a banner to be placed at Reddish Library which advertised that the library remained open during building works, along with details of the Open+ service.
- In relation to proposed reduction in staffing hours within the borough's library services, members queried whether that was likely to affect the additional services provided by libraries such as community hubs and gardens. In response it was stated that the services provided by libraries and library staff were important and that it was planned that librarians would continue to perform those important roles.
- It was requested that consideration be given to the modernisation of library services, for example by introducing printing service and card payments for library fines; services which were currently only available at Stockport Central Library.
- It was noted that there had been no library closures in the borough since 2010 which was a testament to the value placed upon the library service.
- The benefits of the Open+ service were highlighted, in particular residents having extended access to spaces with lights and heating. However, having staff present at the library was important to ensure that residents could access council services. Members queried whether funds could be diverted from other areas to boost library services. The possibility of extending Open+ hours in some areas and increasing staff in others was also suggested.
- In response it was stated that Council was under pressure to make savings. The funding proposals did not involve the closing of any libraries but were designed to achieve savings whilst retaining as good a library service as possible.
- A pilot had taken place in the Heaton to register all library users as Open+ users. This pilot had a successful outcome and there were plans to further extend this to four further areas within the borough followed by the borough as a whole.
- In relation to the proposed reduction in Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staffing levels, it was stated that a consultation with library staff was underway and it was expected that the process would be achieved through natural vacancy management. It might also involve moving staff to different libraries across the borough.

Car Park charges

- It was stated that car parking charges were generally lower in Stockport than across neighbouring authorities.

- It was requested that any previously free car park that were primarily used for residential parking should have an annual charge rather than a pay and display charging model.
- Members also requested that consideration of match-day parking charges around the football ground in Edgely should be postponed. A survey of match-day parking was currently underway and the introduction of charges had the potential to impact the outcome. Members expressed further concern that match-day parking charges could displace parking onto residential roads. It was further commented that residents around the football ground found junctions blocked and cars blocked in on match days.
- In response, it was stated that the proposal to charge on match-days around the Stockport County Football ground was an early stage proposal and the council was in talks with the football club. The expectation was that, following the introduction of charging at car parks around the football ground, the car parks would remain full and would allow the council to maximise income without displacing parking into residential roads.
- It was reported that there were 52 free car parks across the borough and the proposal was to introduce charging where viable. Initially, charging was likely to be introduced at 15 car parks in district centres and at busy local or commuter locations. Consideration would be given to introducing residents' permit parking.
- In relation to a query about the effect of parking charges on local shops, it was considered that a benefit of charging for car parking could be an increase in the churn of car park users and, therefore shoppers.
- Consideration would be given to allowing certain car park users, such as carers who used cars for work, to reclaim parking fees through tax allowance.
- It was planned that the same machines used at other locations would be installed at those car parks where charging would be introduced, representing a one-off cost. Furthermore, Traffic Regulation Orders would be required.
- In relation to civil enforcement officers, Members were invited to contact officers with any local parking issues which might require additional enforcement.
- A consultation related to car park charging proposals was currently live on the council's website. Residents were encouraged to engage with the consultation.

Taxis

- Members commented that charges for taxi drivers had not increased for five years and an increase at this time was considered to be reasonable. However, concern was expressed about the almost 50 per cent increase for the knowledge test fee. Members queried whether this might increase the incidence of taxis licenced outside of the borough working in Stockport.
- In response it was stated that the issue of out of borough licences was being considered at a Greater Manchester level. The importance of Stockport Council operating a robust licencing scheme was emphasised and the charges for licenced drivers was reflective of the council's costs. It was also reported that the authority was in consultation with local traders in relation to the proposed changes and the overall approach was to keep Stockport residents safe.
- It was reported that a Freedom of Information request had identified that one third of all taxi drivers within the Greater Manchester area were registered in Wolverhampton. It was also noted that the Mayor of Greater Manchester had carried out some work on this issue and it was suggested that further political pressure was needed to address

this matter in order to ensure that Stockport residents were able to use trustworthy taxis.

- In response it was stated that efforts had been made to address this matter with Wolverhampton Council as a safeguarding issue.

Asylum seekers

- It was reported that the Home Office was continuing to use hotels within Stockport to house refugees. The council had no control over this process.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

5. 2023/24 MID-YEAR (QUARTER 2) PORTFOLIO PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES REPORTS: COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & SPORT AND PARKS, HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT SERVICES

The Director of Place Management and Director of Development & Regeneration and Director of Strategy submitted a joint report (copies of which had been circulated) detailing the Mid-Year Portfolio Performance and Resource Reports (PPRRs) for the Communities, Culture & Sport and Parks, Highways & Transport Services portfolios.

The Portfolio Reports were based on the 2023/24 Portfolio Performance and Resource Agreements (PPRAs), which were considered by the Committee on 12 June 2023 and approved by Cabinet on 27 June 2023. The Mid-Year Reports focussed on delivery of the portfolio priorities from April to September 2023 and included forecast performance and financial data (where this was available) for the Portfolios, along with an update on the portfolio savings programmes.

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:-

Communities, Culture & Sport

- In relation to the moratorium on library fines, it was reported that this had not resulted in a huge increase in book loans, but had resulted in a significant loss of income in fines. In the light of the current libraries budget, there was a reluctance to pause fines again.
- It was confirmed that £360,000 of the budget had been allocated to the corporate reserve: MTFP resilience and smoothing reserve.
- Members referred to the One Stockport Safety Partnership and the anti-social behaviour review. It was suggested that the Stockport Homes website should have a direct link to the council's form for reporting anti-social behaviour. Members also requested further information relating to report of anti-social behaviour.
- In terms of the UK Strategic Priorities Fund, members commented that asking the community about where funds should be allocated was a good process. Members requested a further report on the success of that programme, along with a report on more granular data related to library users.

- Members commented that the first town centre-wide Christmas celebration event had gone well and requested that consideration be given to making it an annual event.
- In response it was stated that, whilst funding was a consideration, the possibility of holding this event every year was being looked at.
- In terms of the impact of the town of culture, the numbers of museum visits had vastly increased in direct correlation with town of culture events. Members requested a future report on the legacy of the town of culture year in order to draw on the investment and learning for the future.

Parks, Highways & Transport Services

- Members queried whether the 'school streets' programme would be extended into other areas. In response, it was stated that the first school street schemes in the borough had been set up with funds provided by Transport for Greater Manchester and were intended to continue as self-funding. Members also had the option of using ward delegated budgets to set up school street schemes.
- The feasibility of the Highways Investment Programme was in the process of being considered and it was important to consider timing in terms of current interest rates and waiting for a prudential time to invest.
- It was commented that the protection and enhancement of the natural environment was a priority and that a list of proposed locations for orchards, grasslands and meadows had been identified and would be brought to a future meeting of this Committee. Members were requested to propose further locations, particularly for tree planting.
- Members requested more granular detail related to formal interventions on fly-tipping. It was also suggested that CCTV could be employed to assist with fly-tipping enforcement and that a borough-wide approach should be taken to address fly-tipping. In response it was stated that the council's approach was to try to keep the borough clean and use targeted enforcement against fly-tipping. It was further stated that CCTV was reported not to be particularly effective in catching fly-tipping culprits. A report on fly-tipping enforcement would be brought to a future meeting of this Committee.
- Members requested an update on the proposed 20 mile per hour zones, when they were likely to be implemented and how they would be enforced.
- It was confirmed that talks were ongoing with the Greater Manchester Authority to make a business case for bringing Metrolink to Stockport.
- Members commented positively on the active travel programme and requested that active travel be considered in terms of the borough as a whole, rather than on a piecemeal basis.
- Members queried the number of bookings for council-owned tennis courts within the borough and in response it was stated that the usage data showed a healthy number of bookings.
- In terms of unused council-owned buildings within the borough, it was stated that, if a future proposed use involved sports, the feasibility of bringing the building back into use would be considered by this Committee.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

6. ANTI-POVERTY ACTION UPDATE

The Director of Place Management submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update about the council's strategic and systematic response to the cost of living crisis. It also detailed the developing anti-poverty approach which built upon many years of supporting residents in need of financial support.

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

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Members commented that the report was a useful resource for all councillors, particularly in helping to direct residents to relevant resources.
- Members queried whether the update amounted to an anti-poverty strategy and, if so, what mechanisms were in place to analyse its efficacy.
- In response it was stated that the report was currently in draft form with plans to circulate the final version to all members. The report captured the full spectrum of activity on anti-poverty work which had taken place in the past few years, some of which were strategic and some more immediate. In thinking about strategies for the coming years, the report focussed on actions and objectives in terms of what the council would hope to achieve. It was reported that there was no final date for the anti-poverty strategy but that it was expected to be completed soon.
- Members commented on the statistics on pupil premiums and reported that, post-Covid, the educational performance of children with pupil premiums had worsened.
- Members requested that a solution be identified to the lack of an accessible public toilet at the Citizens Advice facility at Stopford House; currently, users had to ask permission to use the toilets and be escorted. In response it was stated that this situation would be investigated.
- In terms of taking account of lived experience, it was important to ensure that the anti-poverty work carried out within the borough took learning from other authorities but that it was the right approach for Stockport residents. The anti-poverty strategy would ensure that power and voice was front and centre in determining strategy.
- Members commented that the case-studies included in the report were a useful addition and helped to bring the report to life.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

7. UPDATE ON EQUALITY OBJECTIVES 2023-2027 AND RESPONSE TO GM EDI STRATEGIES

The Director of Strategy submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an overview of the Equality Objectives which ran from 2023-2027, an update on progress in year 1, outlining the future priorities and how the council was responding to the key GM Equality and Diversity Strategies.

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 suggested that the men's toilets located next to the council chamber should become gender neutral.
- Members commented that the report represented a good start. The nature of inequality began with health and lead to other areas. It was also noted that equality began in childhood and equality gaps could be life-long. It was further commented that the council should do whatever it could to support care-leavers.
- Factors which contributed to a shift in council policy on inequality included the borough becoming more diverse. Information related to the diversity of the borough was available from school census data which, for the first time had asked about sexual orientation. This provided the council with a rich data set in which to understand communities within the borough.
- It was also reported that that further data on the borough was available in the State of the Borough annual report which included census data and key metrics, along with the prototype of labour profiles which were being collated as part of local neighbourhood workshops.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

8. 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 - Legal & Democratic Governance be recommended to programme the following items into the Scrutiny Committee's work programme for the 2023/24 Municipal Year: Communities & Transport Scrutiny Committee

- Joint agency working, including permissions granted for utility companies to work on highways
- Fly tipping enforcement
- Audit of CCTV

The meeting closed at 8.16 pm