

COMMUNITIES & TRANSPORT

Library Services

- Members requested further detail related to the proposals to standardise staffing hours at libraries. It was noted that some libraries had longer staffed opening hours than others which might result in some libraries losing out on their staffed opening hours and others gaining hours.
- In response it was stated that the intention of the proposal was to retain the status quo, whilst reducing staffing hours, and that further information would be given at a future meeting of this Committee.
- It was noted that an extra day of Open+ would affect all libraries equally, losing an additional 52 days of staff time per year, equating to 676 days of library time lost at the 13 libraries which operate Open+ across the borough.
- It was further noted that libraries in areas of high deprivation such as Brinnington, Reddish, Edgeley and Great Moor had longer staffed opening hours than libraries in areas with lower socio-economic need. Members sought reassurance that libraries in more deprived areas would not lose staffed opening hours, particularly in the light of the Equalities Statement which highlighted the importance of low socio-economic communities having local staffed library hours.
- It was also noted that High Lane library was an outlier in terms of the number of staffed hours, being much lower than other libraries within the borough.
- In response it was stated that further details on how the proposals related to library staffing hours were likely to affect library service provision would be provided to a future meeting of this Committee.
- It was noted that library users were unable to use the full range of services during unstaffed, Open+ hours such as printing and paying fines, and the only option for paying cashless fines was at Stockport Central library.
- In response it was stated that work was ongoing to enable remote printing and a digital offer which would operate in a non-staffed environment. Details of when these systems were likely to be in place would be provided at a future meeting.
- It was noted that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) had identified that those with socio-economic needs would be negatively impacted by a reduction in staffed library hours. Families in the most deprived areas of Stockport utilised library services for digital support and family hubs. Members queried whether any alternative approach to cutting staffed library hours had been considered.
- In response it was stated that different proposals had been considered and that the proposal before the Committee was the best response to ensure that all libraries across the borough remained open. It was also stated that the council would ensure that library staff were well connected in terms of being able to signpost residents and provide additional advice.
- A number of council libraries had worked with Stockport Homes in order to share costs and create efficiencies. The council was actively seeking further opportunities to work with other organisations to achieve similar economic efficiencies, one example being the shared facilities at Marple leisure centre and library.
- Members expressed concern about the impact of those proposals upon library staff and asked whether the Council had engaged with unions and what, if any, scope there was for library staff to work flexibly under these proposals.

- In response it was stated that the intention was to introduce these changes flexibly and that the reduction in staffing hours was likely to come about in an uneven way, as the transition would take place over the course of a year through natural churn.
- The council had engaged with the workforce and trade unions and it was expected that the proposal to reduce staffing hours could be achieved with no redundancies.
- One advantage of increasing the number of Open+ hours was that staff would be able to take breaks without closing the library.
- It was reported that at Reddish library it was not possible for members of the public to use the toilet facilities during Open+ hours. Members expressed concern about this situation in particular for vulnerable library users, along with potential health and safety risks for disabled toilet users. Officers confirmed that toilet facilities should be accessible during Open+ hours and that this issue would be investigated.
- Following the pilot in the Heatons to register all library users as Open+ users, it was reported that scheme had been extended to a further six libraries and the intention was to roll this scheme out across the whole borough.

Taxis

- The process for licencing taxi drivers within Stockport was recognised as robust, with drivers and cars held to high standards. Drivers who were licenced outside of the borough, but operating within it, in some instances, had smaller fees to pay but were subjected to less rigorous regulation. Members queried whether the council was able to counter this situation.
- In response it was stated that the council was unable to stop taxi drivers from obtaining licences with other local authorities. The Cabinet Member for Parks, Highways & Transport Services had written to the Secretary of State on this matter but the likelihood of any change to the legislation was slim.
- It was not within the control of the council to ensure that other local authorities were imposing the same standards applied by Stockport Council to its drivers and their vehicles.
- It was reported that a clean air proposal would be considered by the Economy, Regeneration and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee, part of which involved bringing Stockport in line with other authorities across Greater Manchester in relation to the age of vehicles for existing taxi drivers in order to support the clean air agenda. Part of this proposal would include a grant for a scrappage system which would enable taxi drivers to replace old, polluting vehicles with more modern vehicles. Drivers eligible for that grant would only be those licenced within Greater Manchester and it would, therefore, be a benefit to those taxi drivers licenced with Stockport Council.
- Concern was expressed that drivers licenced outside of the borough posed a risk to Stockport residents as the standard of regulation at some local authorities was low. Members suggest that Stockport residents should be encouraged to use local taxi firms and Stockport licenced drivers and that the council could do more to promote those taxi firms who employ Stockport registered drivers.

- Members also commented that private hire taxi drivers were charged more to set down and pick up at Manchester Airport than hackney cab drivers. Officers stated that this matter would be investigated.

Car parking

- In relation to the proposal to start charging at 15 council car parks which were currently free, members enquired about the consultation process. In response it was stated that once the feasibility work was complete, reports would be submitted to Area Committees to present proposals to local Members and generate a public discussion.
- It was noted that the Hibbert Lane/Church Lane carp park had been listed as being within the Marple North ward but it was, in fact, in Marple South ward.
- Members commented on how these proposals might affect Edgeley residents. There were a number of pay and display carparks in the area which were unused whilst people parked for free on local roads. Members enquired whether district centre parking would also be reviewed as part of this process.
- In response it was stated that the introduction of charging at some carparks formed part of the feasibility work and consideration would be given to which carparks were likely to generate income. It was not planned that charging would be introduced at all carparks which were currently free. The approach taken by the council had been to consider public carparking spaces in district centres, taking a logical approach and alleviating inconsistencies. It was noted that there were some differences in Edgeley district centre, taking account of match-day parking.
- A report would be provided to a future meeting of this Committee on carparking, including on-street parking, how traders pay for parking and how pay and display machines work.
- Members requested the Cabinet Member for Parks, Highways & Transport Services gave consideration to a request from the residents of St Matthews Terrace to introduce a permit scheme rather than charging all users for parking.

CORPORATE, RESOURCE MANAGEMENT & GOVERNANCE

- Members requested that consideration be given to cutting the mayoral budget as the Mayor's role was to promote Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council.
- Whilst it was recognised that the work of the Mayor was a way to present the borough and to attract business opportunities, the budget plans had presented an opportunity to consider the way the mayoral budget was managed. It was thought that, even with a reduced spend on the mayoral budget, the Mayor's role would remain valuable.
- In response to a question about birth rates within the borough, it was stated that median trends in birth rates were examined in order to plan for school place requirements. The council worked closely with the education and public health sector in this area.
- Members commented that the Local Government settlement was abysmal and, in the light of that, assumptions were being made about an increase in council tax of 2.9 per cent, with two per cent of that increase being earmarked for social care. Members asked whether the council was considering an increase to council tax.
- In response it was stated that Local Governments were being pressed by central Government to increase council tax. In the light of the cost of living crisis, there was a need for a sensitive, holistic and sustainable review of council tax. The outcome of this review would be contained within the budget report.
- In terms of any potential increase to council tax, the council had been modelling percentages to discover how each might affect the revenue budget.
- The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) had recognised that the removal of the AMI chat bot was an exception to the general proposal that basic cuts would not have a disproportionate impact. Members queried the implication of the removal of the AMI chat bot on equality.
- In response it was stated that removing the chat bot functionality from the council's website might disproportionately affect those who have used it to interact with the website and who may struggle to use the website in other ways. Consideration was being given to upgrading the council's website with, for example, a translation function and alternative formatting which would increase its accessibility.
- Members commented that service efficiencies of £330,000 in the mayoral budget, the integrated care system and AMI chat bot were the right areas in which to look for savings. Furthermore, Members expressed that it was encouraging that the consultation exercise had seen some support for the budget proposals.
- In terms of the budget consultation, it was acknowledged that the response rate, being 76 respondents, was poor and that more work could be done to achieve a greater level of response in future consultations. Whilst many people across the borough had not been engaged, it was in everyone's interests to become involved. It was suggested that consideration be given to where the consultation was advertised and how councillors and officers could do more to ensure that it became a more purposeful exercise in the future.
- Any suggestions to improve the participation rates in future consultations were welcomed.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

- Concern was expressed relating to the low response rate to the public consultation and how it could be improved. In response, it was stated that across the various portfolios it was only about 76 responses for the children's portfolio, however, all responses have to be taken into account. It was also noted that in response to the low rate it was proposed that changes to services needed to be co-produced which would encourage more engagement through the co-production model and charter.
- Clarification was sought relating to the Independent Travel Training (ITT) shifting from the SEN Transport team to the Education & Health Care Plans team to manage and whether there was any capacity. It was noted that there had already been an increase in capacity within the teams and that there were currently no vacancies. It was also stated that the shift in teams would enable better coordination in the process.
- Members enquired about the SEN Transport and whether parents/carers could assist with taking the children to school. In response, it was explained the 'personal budgets' was in place for that specific reason and would also be consulted upon in order to make it easier, encourage more parents to be a part of it.
- It was commented that clarification was needed regarding the insurance situation having paid drivers with multiple children in the SEN transport and whether there was any concerns. In response, it was stated that it would be looked into and the information shared with the Committee.
- Members sought clarification on the marriage and civil partnerships data and whether it was accurate. It was stated that it would be checked and reported back to the Committee.
- Further information was requested relating to how personal budgets was acquired and was there capacity to meet demand. In response, it was stated that the additional detail relating to the personal budgets would be shared with the Committee, however, there are families who would like to have personal budgets, but was the incentive there, which was currently being looked at to make it worth their while. There was an administrative burden relating to doing things differently but there was increased capacity factored into the budget proposals.
- It was commented that regarding the consultation the number of personal budgets would be useful information together with the growth in the numbers of the young people on EHCPs to better understand the process for those engaging in the consultation process.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE & HEALTH

- It was noted that a large proportion of the efficiencies and savings centred around continuing to care for people in their own homes and whilst this was conducive with the preference of the majority of residents, it was commented that a small minority of older people would prefer the company and support that residential care offered.
- In relation to patient choice, it was queried whether residential care was an option for residents were this was their preference.
- In response, it was commented that for these residents there may be fears in relation to returning to their own homes around risk of falls and isolation, there would be an offer of intermediate care, step-down from hospital, into a facility that would support them with their confidence to maximise their independence. It was stated that work was ongoing to offer a wider range of services at a neighbourhood level. It was noted that the Care Act required the service to look at individuals based on their individual need, there was a national criteria for health, care and support and a decision would be made with the individual based on meeting their needs in the best way for them.
- Additional information was requested in relation to the benchmarking information reference in the report that Stockport had high fee rates compared to other Local Authorities.
- In response, it was stated that this would feature as part of the Annual Residential/ Nursing Care, Home Care and other Care Management Fee Setting report which was due to be considered at the February meeting of the Committee. It was noted that Stockport's fee rates comparatively with the North West were quite high related to the range and number of provision, land value and level of residents who were self-funders and able to pay higher rates for care. It was noted that it was important to offer different types of provision and ways to support people to stay independent in their own homes because of the cost such as extra care housing.
- It was queried whether any of the saving proposals included adopting shared services with other Local Authorities or agencies.
- In response, it was commented that whilst there was nothing actively planned in terms of specific opportunities, a small number of proposals had been considered in the last year including a complex needs facility led by Tameside, however relating to the costs associated and appetite from other Local Authorities it was decided that the proposal would be reconsidered at a future date. It was noted that there were limitations in relation to shared facilities relating to the preference of individuals within their localities being closer to home, however there was potential for efficiencies around sharing back office costs and different models of commissioning.
- It was noted that the local government financial settlement had been disappointing and there was unity across the council chamber in the response to Government around the inadequate resources that were available to the council.
- In relation to the Equality Impact Assessment and the impact of the proposals, it was noted that the changes were likely to disproportionately affect residents who required council resources the most including older people, younger people, people with a disability, low income, people living in deprived areas, people experiencing homelessness, veterans, asylum seekers and refugees.

- In response, it was commented that financial position of local government constrained the council's ability to deliver services, however the council were doing as much as possible to protect the most vulnerable residents in Stockport which included an emphasis on preventative services and neighbourhood working across health services.
- Members commented on the importance of multi-year settlements for local government and noted that most people's interactions with government was with local government.
- In relation to managing the external care markets and bringing third party top ups in house, it was queried whether there would be a policy and resource to manage this.
- In response, it was commented that the service had been working to create the capacity and space for this work through the social care charging team by utilising some of the modules within the client finance systems more effectively and modest resource.

ECONOMY, REGENERATION & CLIMATE CHANGE

- Following a suggestion by members of the Scrutiny Committee at their meeting held on 23 November 2023, members were pleased to note that caddy liners were now available to residents through the library service.
- In response to a question as to the differential of the cost to the applicant for the submission of a larger development application as opposed to a householder application, it was advised that this was significant.
- It was noted that there had been a low number of responses to the budget consultation, although this number had doubled from the consultation carried out last year. It was asked that further thought be given to increasing the level of response in the future. Ideas as to how to further increase engagement were welcomed.