

COMMUNITIES & TRANSPORT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 15 January 2024

At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Joe Barratt (Chair), Councillor Matt Wynne (Vice-Chair), Councillors Geoff Abell, Steve Gribbon, Yvonne Guariento, Dominic Hardwick, Helen Hibbert, Tom Morrison and Rachel Wise

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 20 November 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

Rachel Wise	Agenda Item 9 – ‘Agenda Planning’ as a friend of Reddish South Station which may be affected by the planned 'Restore Your Railways' item that was due for consideration at the 26 February 2024 meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.
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Officer

Officer

Interest

Mark Glynn	Agenda Item 4 – ‘Cabinet Response: Responding to Medium Term Financial Plan’ 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. CABINET RESPONSE: RESPONDING TO 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 Cabinet response.

The appendix to the report outlined the change proposals being considered by 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 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 Scrutiny 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 Scrutiny 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 Heaton 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 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 car park had been listed as being within the Marple North ward but it was, in fact, in Marple South & High Lane 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 not well used 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 car parks formed part of the feasibility work and consideration would be given to which car parks were likely to generate income. It was not planned that charging would be introduced at all car parks which were currently free. The approach taken by the council had been to consider public car parking 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 Scrutiny Committee on car parking, 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.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

5. ONE STOCKPORT SAFETY PARTNERSHIP (OSSP) SERIOUS VIOLENCE STRATEGIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND PLAN 2024/25

The Director of Strategy submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out proposed activities to plan and collaborate to prevent and tackle serious violence in Stockport.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- The knife amnesties were welcomed as a way to help tackle knife crime and to get knives off the streets. It was reported that many of the amnesties included all forms of weapons, however the focus in Stockport was to have a comprehensive programme of knife-crime prevention. Knife-awareness sessions took place at schools and colleges across the borough. It was agreed that the wording of future amnesties would reflect the fact that they were for all weapons.

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- Recent weapons amnesties were reported to have been successful, but were not the only tool available to tackle violence.
- The Detached Youth Work Team had made a bid for funding in Brinnington and Adswold. The Team aimed to operate in an agile way in order to work with partnership agencies and respond to priorities. In the past year it had undertaken outreach work in Reddish.
- In terms of work on domestic abuse, a representative of the Director of Strategy undertook to provide a summary of the work of the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to Members of the Committee.
- Members commented that resources to tackle youth violence were stretched following cuts to youth and outreach services.
- In response to a query about the type of outreach services provided by the council, Members were informed that, through the Community Safety Fund, the council provided boxing sessions each Friday at Hattons Gym along with additional activities in school holidays. In addition, football activities had been offered through the Manchester United and Manchester City Foundation Programme.
- Children were identified for the council's outreach programmes through its own statutory services and, additionally, those children who had been stopped by the police, arrested or placed on bail and those who had been identified through schools as being at risk. The outreach services were promoted through schools and community hubs, with a planned move to a family hub model.
- Members hoped that, in the future and budget permitting, it would be possible to provide outreach work across more venues in the borough to enable children to access activities in their local areas.
- Members asked about the risks of violence faced by children travelling to and from school and whether schools themselves carry any responsibility for ensuring children's safety on their journeys.
- In response it was stated that the team ran knife crime and weapons awareness training within schools, with a particular focus on the dangers of carrying a knife for protection. Furthermore, the team worked in partnership with the Greater Manchester Police, schools, parents and pupils to tackle violence outside of schools. It was reported that rates of knife-crime in Stockport were much lower than those in neighbouring areas.
- Members asked about work being carried out to support children who were growing up in households experiencing domestic violence, which could have a severe life-long impact and affect future families.
- In response it was stated that the Council employed a nationally accredited programme known as Respect to deliver services for children who were being violent outside of the home and experiencing domestic violence within it. That service was provided by 'Talkchangelisten.org'. More work was being done to train staff to identify those children who experienced or witnessed domestic violence.
- Members queried what support was in place for children who were victims of sexual violence perpetrated by another child, or for the parents of those children who were accused of sexual violence.
- In response it was stated that this was a sensitive and complex area which involved specialist officers, social workers and the Youth Justice team. The council worked closely with the Greater Manchester Police in such cases. It was often the case that such incidents revealed very complex sets of circumstances within families. It was also reported that there had been a significant increase in online sexual crimes.

- Members requested an updated report for a future meeting of this committee.

RESOLVED – (1) That the proposed additional actions for 2024/25 outlined in the tables at paragraph 4.1 of the report be noted.

(2) That the OSSP's intention to use these proposed additional actions as the basis for its Serious Violence Plan for 2024/25 be noted.

(3) That the OSSP's proposed approach to serious violence assessment and planning beyond 2024/25 set out in paragraph 2.5, namely, to incorporate work relating to serious violence as a specific strand within its overall assessment and planning arrangements be noted.

6. BRIEFING NOTE TO SCRUTINY: INTERCHANGE PARK UPDATE

The Assistant Director of Neighbourhoods submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the opening of the Interchange Park.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- In terms of security at the park, it was reported that the CCTV would be monitored and that security staff would be attached to the council's contact centre. In addition, the council would be working with police on security arrangements for the park.
- A crime impact assessment had been carried out and this assessment would be reviewed after one year. The council was working with the police who had provided a set of recommendations which were being followed. It was planned that the council would adopt an agile response to any issues related to crime at the park.
- Members requested details on the planned weekend of events which were scheduled to take place following the opening of the park. In response it was stated that these events were planned to be the culmination Stockport's year of the Town of Culture. The event themes would include heritage, communities across the borough and intergenerational events. Publicity for these planned events would take place soon.
- In response to a query about the planned maintenance of vegetation at the park, it was reported that resilient vegetation had been planted and that, in addition to council maintenance, a 'friends of' group would be set up to take some ownership of the vegetation and enhance the space.
- Members commented that a 'friends of' group would be an asset to the park and engender a sense of community pride.
- In response to a question about the retail units at the park, it was reported that Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) was working with potential tenants. The council did not currently have details related to the letting of retail units, but it would share information with the Scrutiny Committee as soon as it was available.
- Members commented positively on the high quality of the interchange park development, its appearance and that it was an asset for Stockport town centre. The inclusion of CCTV at the site was noted as a positive outcome.
- A site visit was requested for Members prior to the opening of interchange park.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

7. THRIVING PLACES - ACHIEVING CLEAN, WELCOMING NEIGHBOURHOODS

The Assistant Director of Neighbourhoods submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing detail on the balanced approach of prevention and enforcement in relation to addressing enviro-crime issues in supporting Stockport's neighbourhoods as 'thriving places'.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Members asked about the use of CCTV in preventing and resolving environmental crime. In response it was reported that the council operated four types of CCTV: those located at buildings owned by the council, public realm cameras located mainly in the town centre, those located in carparks and finally temporary mobile cameras which were used in fly-tipping hotspots.
- Covert cameras used for fly tipping were reported to be difficult to use and had only limited success. It was reported that a review of the use of CCTV for fly-tipping was ongoing in order to explore the efficacy and appropriateness of their use and to ensure they were used to their best effect.
- Members expressed concern about the council's record for the enforcement of fly tipping. It was noted that there had been 905 incidents of fly tipping reported across the borough in the first two quarters of the reporting year, but only one prosecution and five fixed penalty notices issued.
- In response it was stated that the council needed to take a balanced approach. If prosecution was attempted, rubbish could sit for days or weeks while evidence was gathered. The council had to decide between clearing waste and time-consuming enforcement.
- Members suggested that a review of the approach to enforcement of fly-tipping was needed. Residents had reported repeated cycles of rubbish being dumped and, with a lack of consequences, it was felt that the situation was less likely to change.
- Members referred to online advertisements for 'man and van' services which were potential culprits of fly-tipping and queried whether council officers checked social media for such advertisements. It was also suggested that residents could be warned that they could be liable for handing over goods for disposal to an unlicensed practitioner.
- The Spring Clean programme and social media, along with a coordinated regional approach, such as a GM campaign, were being used to raise awareness of the impact of using unlicensed companies to remove garden and other waste which inevitably ended up being fly-tipped.
- Members offered to assist in monitoring social media sites for 'man and van' advertisements.
- Further enforcement practises related to fly tipping included a recent stop and search exercise which was carried out in conjunction with the police to root out unlicensed carriers. That was reported to have been successful and plans were in place to repeat that exercise in the coming months.
- Members commented that public spaces which were kept tidy and free from litter were less likely to experience littering offences.
- Members referred to asset management and ownership related to grass verges, some of which were owned by the council and others by Stockport Homes and queried

whether it might be possible for the council to maintain all grass verges and charge back for those which were not under its ownership.

- In response it was agreed that council officers should act as custodians of public realm spaces and where clearing or tidying was required in a public realm space, council officers should act. Members were requested to provide specific examples of any incidents where only partial maintenance work had been carried out due to ownership issues.
- The enforcement for littering required a witness and the offender being given an opportunity to rectify their actions. In recent cases offenders had been issued with on the spot fines. The council was in the process of creating a regular programme of enforcement days for littering.
- Members requested information on TLC's approach to street cleaning in different areas of the borough with differing needs.
- Members commented that the use of Community Protection Warnings could be labour-intensive and slow to rectify environmental and anti-social issues. Members queried whether fixed-penalty notices would be more effective than Community Protection Warnings.
- In response it was stated that a Community Protection Warning was not used as a first line of defence. Rather, officers made initial attempts to engage with residents and businesses in order to resolve issues. It was further reported that Community Protection Warnings were issued in very specific circumstances and that officers had relevant training and experience to deliver a balanced approach between community education, support and enforcement. Enforcement action was taken against repeat offenders.
- Members requested information on enforcement action being taken by the council in relation to dog fouling. In response it was stated that the council's actions on that subject would be included in a future report.
- Members noted that 58 warnings had been issued in the past year for car cruising Public Space Protection Orders. It was reported that all 58 warnings came from a single incident.

RESOLVED - That the report be noted.

8. WALKING AND CYCLING UPDATE REPORT

The Director of Place Management submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the progress on the delivery of the Walking and Cycling Strategy and the wider commitment to active travel.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Members noted that 'Walk Ride Greater Manchester' had written to the council on a number of the points raised within the Walking and Cycling Update Report. It was reported that the council would provide a response to Walk Ride Greater Manchester and the Cabinet Member for Parks, Highways and Transport Services undertook to provide Members with a copy of that response.
- Members asked whether an analysis had taken place to establish whether the Markets and Underbanks active travel scheme had met its stated aim to improve experience for residents and businesses. In response it was stated that the scheme was scheduled to

go live within a few weeks', following which a formal analysis would be expected after one year.

- Members asked about the availability of disabled parking access at the market. In response it was stated that no disabled parking bays had been removed in that area and that blue-badge parking holders were able to park on double-yellow lines. The area itself was constrained and disabled parking would be looked at.
- It was further reported that conversations about emergency vehicle access at the market with the market manager were ongoing.
- In terms of funding walking and cycling schemes within the borough, central government had reduced funding for active travel which had impacted on the funding available in Stockport.
- Members suggested that the council should have schemes ready to implement in order to take advantage of any funding which might become available. In response it was stated that the council had several schemes drawn up and that it had to prioritise those schemes which were most likely to be successful in bidding rounds.
- Members welcomed funding to improve access to non-inclusive paths and it was reported that Stockport was the first council in the country to have a policy on the accessibility of paths.
- It was reported that funding for cycle lockers at train stations was limited, however discussions related to them were ongoing.
- It was reported that the application to the Secretary of State for a Designation Order to obtain moving traffic enforcement powers to allow Stockport Council to take on powers to manage moving traffic contraventions had been submitted in October 2023 and that a decision was expected in Spring of 2024. Should the application be granted, the council planned to use its powers at relevant sites.
- The viability of utilising powers to manage moving traffic on school streets would be considered, however these schemes were reliant on volunteers.
- Members welcomed plans for a cycling network across the borough which would encourage cycle use. However, concern was expressed about the cycle network in two areas; the A555 link between High Lane and Middlewood Way and the A6 going towards Stockport Town Centre where there were problems related to land acquisition.
- In response it was stated that the creation of a borough-wide walk cycle network was a long process and that work was ongoing. Schemes currently under review included those in Hazel Grove and around Greek Street.
- The business case for the School Lane/Heaton Chapel/A6 scheme remained in development and was likely to be completed within six months.
- Members emphasised the need to the council to continue its work to link walking and cycling routes across the borough.

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.

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(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:-

- Joint agency working, including permissions granted for utility companies to work on highways
- An interim report on Marketplace and Underbanks.

The meeting closed at 9.01 pm