

## **Stockport Labour: Our Approach to the 2024/2025 Revenue Budget**

During this last municipal year, Stockport Labour has provided leadership on a constructive basis, working with colleagues from across this chamber.

Our approach to the next municipal year's budget has sought not only to emphasise the need to have a council that gets the basics right but builds on creating a Stockport that is fairer and economically more equitable.

## **Stockport Labour's Approach to Local Community Delegated Funding**

Stockport Labour believes the best decisions are those taken closest to the people they affect. By putting power and money more under the control of local communities, local people can make decisions about how to improve the areas they live, work and play.

Stockport Labour Group is proud to support delegated decision-making at area committee level so that local people have even more say over how the council should prioritise local spending – indeed, this is especially important given residents are effectively paying more in Council Tax but getting less in council services. Residents should have a meaningful say in how their money is spent.

As part of our budget amendment, we were going to propose reversing the surprising proposal made by the Liberal Democrats to 'raid' the local delegated budgets from local area committees and take central control. This was also without a plan on where in the borough these resources would be allocated.

Therefore, we welcome the U-turn announced to drop this extremely disappointing and undemocratic proposal.

However, we note that this proposal may well return in the future – and this is something we would be highly unlikely to support without clear and sufficient detail.

## **Library and Parking Proposals: Use of the Socio-Economic Duty**

We are fully aware of the unfair pressures that have been placed on local government finance. Over the last 14 years, Stockport has had a real terms cut of 66% in government baseline funding.

This year is no different, with the Government expecting us to increase Council Tax by 4.99%, while at the same time make even further cuts to the services we provide to our residents.

A Stockport Labour administration would have to make equally difficult decisions. However, we would continue to protect the most vulnerable in our borough and ensure that all decisions are made and assessed using the Socio-Economic Duty process that we proposed to council during this municipal year.

Across Stockport, libraries act as community hubs. They serve people of every age, ethnicity and physical ability. They provide the full range of information and resources needed to live, learn, and work in the borough.

This is why Stockport Labour is proud of Stockroom and the funding we secured when we ran Stockport Council, to deliver a brand new, 21<sup>st</sup> century library for our borough that will also continue to build upon the work we started on Stockport town centre.

But library facilities are particularly important in our more deprived areas. We were incredibly disappointed to see that the library proposals are set to impact on libraries within our more deprived areas the most.

We recognise the financial strain this council is under. However, we will not stand by and allow our most vulnerable residents be impacted yet again by the Government's lack of funding. As a Labour Group, we are committed to working with colleagues and unions to do all we can to ensure that all savings can be made without the need for compulsory redundancies.

**Budget Amendment 1: After years of Tory mismanagement we are forced to accept the financial saving being proposed to the library service – but on condition any decisions regarding the reduction in opening hours and staffed service is taken following a full assessment, with due regard to the Socio-Economic Duty. This would fast-track the process of using the Socio-Economic Duty within council decision making, as proposed to be introduced in 2027.**

Across Stockport, the council has historically provided free car parks as a way for residents of homes with no off-street parking and customers of local centres to park responsibly. This allows the free flow of traffic and keeps the pavements clear for pedestrians.

This need has not changed and introducing charges will negatively impact pedestrians, cyclists and traffic flow when people try and avoid on-street parking charges they may not be able to afford.

It is also disappointing that the opportunity has not been taken to introduce active travel upgrades to some of these car parks, such as bike hangers.

**Budget Amendment 2: Therefore, in line with our approach on libraries, we are prepared to agree to the savings on condition a full assessment, with due regard to the Socio-Economic Duty, is undertaken.**

**Both amendments 1 and 2 will complement the decision making in the implementation of the proposals but are not intended or expected to reduce the value of the saving proposals nor the speed of implementation as set out in the budget proposals.**

### **Getting the Basics Right: Drain Cleaning Investment**

The effect of climate change is becoming increasingly apparent, no more so then when we suffer from heavy rainfall.

The scrutiny review on Stockport's communal corridors is currently focussing on drainage cleaning as part of its work. Without predetermining the outcomes of this review, it is already apparent that we need to invest in reliable equipment to ensure that gully cleaning is done in the most effective way.

**Budget Amendment 3: Stockport Labour proposes to invest an additional £160,000 in drainage cleaning, which could include the purchase of a new gully cleaner with the highest sustainability specification (ideally electric) subject to market availability. This will give us improved efficiency in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way. This is in addition to the funding that was to be taken out of delegated ward budgets, but which has now been provided by the Government.**

## **Getting the Basics Right: The Management of Stockport's Housing Stock**

Stockport Labour know that housing is the major issue in Stockport – and especially the provision of affordable and social housing.

We welcome that, finally, Stockport Council will be consulting on much-needed Local Plan.

Following the the tragedies of Grenfell Tower and Awaab Ishak, we have seen new legislative and regulatory changes that make councils more responsible and accountable for maintaining council stock.

Since 2005, Stockport Council's housing stock has been managed by the Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO), Stockport Homes.

Councils across the country, including Bury, Cheltenham and Newcastle, have recently reviewed their housing management options and discontinued their ALMOs. Their decisions have resulted in significant sums – well into the millions per year – previously unavailable to them being reinvested back into basic services, thereby with a view to provide a better service for tenants and indeed all residents.

**Budget Amendment 4: It is 10 years since a review has taken place into whether the existing ALMO model is still the right model for managing Stockport's housing stock. It is time we consider what the best approach is for Stockport, its housing tenants and residents as a whole.**

**Therefore, we propose that a full and independent review takes place into how Stockport's housing stock is managed and whether the existing ALMO model continues to be right one for Stockport. Officers of the Council have given the view that it could be expected to undertake this independent review at a cost of c. £100,000.**

In summary, our key amendments are:

1. To undertake a full assessment, with due regard to the Socio-Economic Duty, of the saving proposals for libraries (no financial impact);
2. To undertake a full assessment, with due regard to the Socio-Economic Duty, of the savings proposals for parking (no financial impact);
3. To invest an additional £160,000 into drainage cleaning with a view this could be used to purchase a new gully cleaner. This is to be funded out of the council's Invest to Save reserve (cost: £160,000); and
4. To undertake a full, independent review that will help determine the right model for managing Stockport's housing stock, given the legislative and regulatory changes that have taken place and the financial position the council is in. This includes considering whether the existing ALMO model – Stockport Homes – continues to be the right one for Stockport, its tenants and residents. This is to be funded out of the council's Invest to Save reserve (cost: £100,000).

**Total cost of amendment: £260,000.**

**Proposed by: Cllr Christine Carrigan**

**Seconded by: Cllr David Meller**

## **Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer – Risk Assessment**

*The Deputy Chief Executive and S151 officer has reviewed the amendment and undertaken a risk assessment of the budget proposal as a result. The Deputy Chief Executive's comments are set out below:*

*The amendment seeks that an assessment is undertaken, with due regard to the socio-economic duty, for two saving proposals agreed by the Cabinet; the Libraries and Parking Review saving proposals. The amendment is clear that there is no intention or expectation from the amendment for the value of the savings proposals to change or for any alteration to the timeline of implementation. The amendment also seeks one-off investment for a vehicle acquisition and an independent review with this non-recurrent spend being funded by an additional appropriation from reserves of £0.260m.*

*On the basis of the above; that there is no expectation that the assessment will impact on the value or timeline for implementation of the saving proposals and the appropriation of £0.260m of available reserves to fund non-recurrent spend, my assessment of the 2024/25 budget remains as set out in the report, i.e. that the estimates made for the purposes of the calculation of the budget are robust and the level of reserves and balances are adequate.*

*The relevant appendices to the 2024/25 Cabinet Revenue Budget report have been updated to reflect the proposed budget amendment. The updated appendices are attached to the proposed budget amendment with changes highlighted in yellow.*