

ECONOMY, REGENERATION & CLIMATE CHANGE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 23 January 2025
At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Claire Vibert (Chair) in the chair; Councillor James Frizzell (Vice-Chair); Councillors Jake Austin, Will Dawson, Ian Hunter, Micheala Meikle, David Meller, Dena Ryness and Aron Thornley.

1. MINUTES

The minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 28 November 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

The following interest was declared:

Personal interest

Officer

Interest

Mark Glynn

Agenda item 5 'Cabinet Response: Responding to Medium-Term Financial Plan' as Chair of Totally Local Company (TLC). TLC was referenced within the report.

3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. DRAFT STOCKPORT LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

The Assistant Director Place Making & Planning submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) which provided a summary of the main changes to the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) from the version consulted on earlier this year.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Environment (Councillor Mark Roberts) responded to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/issues raised:

- The report had previously been considered by members of the Development Plan Working Party (DPWP) at their meeting held on 15 January 2025. Thanks were expressed to members of the DPWP for their continued contributions on work for the local plan as it progressed.

- It was noted that the Local Development Scheme had now been updated and published on the council's website.
- The council were awaiting key information in relation to grey and green belt land from government, which would then enable the council to apply that section of the NPPF to the draft plan. Further guidance was also awaited as to what would be deemed necessary infrastructure to development.
- A concern was raised around the sacrificing of green belt land, and that, if this was necessary, the council needed a multi-agency approach to ensure that affordable housing was the priority for this land.
- Members were advised that Stockport's affordable housing policy built on national policy and other Stockport specific provisions in ensuring affordable products were available for residents. The government had been clear that they wanted to see a significant proportion of affordable properties being built. It was noted that much of the delivery of affordable housing was dependent on the work of government and Homes England. It was also noted that the Housing Needs Assessment for Stockport was in the process of being updated.
- It was advised that, for new developments, delivering biodiversity net gain (BNG) on site was preferable and always the 'starting point'. A report on BNG was expected to be presented to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee detailing the work happening in this area.
- The government encouraged the allocation of brownfield land, then grey belt and subsequently green belt land for development. The challenge for Stockport was that the borough did not have enough brownfield land.
- Members were advised that the council would be able to set its own 'golden rules' for green belt development in Stockport and members were encouraged to help shape these golden rules to align with local need.
- The council was undertaking a green belt assessment to accommodate an increase in development needs as a result of changes in the revised NPPF, and it was hoped that the council's expression of interest for government funding would be successful in supporting this work, as well as fund further work in this area.
- It was suggested that how to connect the Bee Network with railway stations be explored and factored into the local plan process.
- It was suggested that a golden rule could focus on a 'Stockport local' aspect and a percentage of green belt land be retained for local Stockport residents and Stockport needs.
- It was noted that the proposed localisation of planning fees in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill would be on a cost recovery basis and not a profit venture; further government guidance was awaited on this matter.

RESOLVED - (1) that the report be noted; and

(2) that the Draft Stockport Local Plan would have to be progressed in conformity with the updated National Planning Policy Framework be noted.

5. CABINET RESPONSE: RESPONDING TO MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Cabinet Members for Climate Change & Environment and Economy, Regeneration & Housing submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) outlining the proposed approach in responding to the medium-term financial plan.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Environment (Councillor Mark Roberts) responded to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/issues raised:

- The report outlined the budget proposals being considered by Cabinet to address the council's financial challenges and balance the rising cost of delivering services to the people in Stockport's communities who needed it most. It was noted that this reflected a national picture, with local authorities up and down the country facing difficult decisions to ensure their books were balanced whilst keeping vital services running.
- Members were pleased that the consultation had received strong engagement from residents and noted the strength of feeling and feedback received. It was queried as to how the consultation feedback would shape the council's approach to the budget proposals. It was noted that, given the council's constrained budget position, the waste proposals would press ahead. It was noted that the consultation feedback had been valuable in helping to shape these proposals, specifically in relation to composting, and communication. Further, as a result of feedback, a discount for a larger blue bin and a larger compost bin had been explored, as well as a review of payment mechanisms.
- Concerns raised around a potential increase in fly-tipping had been tested and it was reported that these concerns had not come to fruition in other local authority areas in which the proposals had already been implemented.
- The importance of communications was stressed in giving residents an understanding as to the reasons for the proposals. Namely, difficult decisions needed to be made in support of the protection of essential services of the council e.g., adults or children's services.
- It was queried as to how realistic the one-month timescale for the implementation of the waste proposals was, and members were reassured that systems were in place, and significant changes would not be required to crew workload to implement the proposals. Literature would be placed on brown bins to communicate the proposed changes to households in a timely manner.
- The proposed charge for an extra capacity blue bin would be £15, and the current blue bin would be removed and either be reused or recycled. It was not proposed that households have more than one blue bin, as this would increase bin lifts and lead to a significant increase in crew workload.
- The proposed discount for a compost bin would be approximately £10, and approximately £20 for larger compost bins.
- Some 'friends of' and church groups who collected green waste currently received a free service. Although a free service was not proposed to be continued, the council would explore ways to continue to support these groups, whether that be through discounts or other means.
- It was noted that the council was one of three metropolitan borough councils that were unable to access the government's recovery grant, and that further detail on the settlement was expected in February 2025. In light of this, the importance of the

proper application of socio-economic duty in relation to the council's policies was noted.

- It was estimated that implementation of the waste proposals would bring a benefit of £2m to the council.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

6. UPDATE ON GM GOOD EMPLOYMENT CHARTER AND REAL LIVING WAGE

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) which provided an update on the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter, an initiative designed to elevate employment standards across the region. Launched in 2019, the Charter emerged from a collaborative effort among local leaders, businesses, and stakeholders who recognized the need for a framework to promote fair and inclusive employment practices.

The following comments were made/issues raised:

- Members were advised that the number of businesses signing up to the Charter had increased and businesses were keen to 'do the right thing'. However, the challenges of paying the real living wage were significant and acted as a disincentive to businesses.
- A meeting was scheduled in mid-February to consider what action could be taken by the council to help businesses further.
- There was scope to review the target of supporters and/or joiners to the Charter, but it was felt that this should remain ambitious.
- Further information would be sought and circulated to members as to the reasons why 7 employers had lost Charter accreditation.
- It was suggested that a sliding scale of membership e.g., bronze, silver or gold membership could be beneficial for businesses. It was also suggested that the rules could be relaxed for smaller businesses until they reached a certain point of growth.
- It was noted that there were many businesses in Stockport already paying employees over the real living wage. The care sector was experiencing particular challenge with the threshold of National Insurance and business rate relief being reduced.

RSOLVED – That the report be noted.

7. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET REPORT 2025/26

The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and the Director of Place Management submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) which provided an illustrative Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget for 2025/26, including the level of rent and service charges.

The following comments were made/issues raised:

- The report set out the proposed annual uplift in rent and service charges needed for the purpose of maintaining decent homes, refreshing housing stock and meeting climate targets.
- It was noted that Stockport Homes Group (SHG) was cheaper than other registered providers.

- Tenant groups had been consulted on the proposals and 500 responses had been received.
- It was reported that the use of biomass was a challenge for the residents of Lancashire Hill, whose cost of heating and hot water was significant; residents were unable to switch suppliers as the system was fuelled by biomass. Further information as to this matter would be sought and circulated to the Scrutiny Committee by email.
- Members were pleased to see that the hardship fund remained to support tenants with the increases.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

8. INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF STOCKPORT'S HOUSING MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

With the consent of the Scrutiny Committee, this item was withdrawn from the agenda.

9. UPDATE ON THE WORK OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW PANELS

It was noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Review Panel (District and Local Centres – best practice and building upon it) was scheduled to take place on 5 February 2025. At the meeting, it was expected that the panel would decide upon the recommendations for inclusion within the Draft Final Report of the panel. There had been some difficulties in information-gathering from other local authority areas and this piece of work was ongoing. However, it was noted that this particular challenge would not detract from the usefulness of the report.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

10. WORK PROGRAMME

A representative of the Assistant Director for Governance submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) which set out the work programme of the Scrutiny Committee and detailed forward plan items that fell within the remit of the committee for information.

It was agreed that the following items would be scheduled for consideration at a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee:

- High Street Rental Auctions briefing
- District Centre Update

RESOLVED – (1) that the report be noted; and

(2) that the representative of the Assistant Director for Governance be requested to make arrangements for the items 'High Street Rental Auctions briefing' and 'District Centre Update' to be included within the work programme for the Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting closed at 8.00 pm