

ECONOMY, REGENERATION & CLIMATE CHANGE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 6 March 2025
At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

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

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 6 March 2025 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 interests were declared:-

Personal and Prejudicial Interest

<u>Councillor</u>	<u>Interest</u>
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David Meller	Agenda Item 7 – ‘Proposal to consult on the expansion of the boundary of Stockport Mayoral Development Corporation’ as a Member of the Board of the Stockport Mayoral Development Corporation.
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It was noted that the Standards Committee had approved a dispensation to enable those councillors who were members of the Board of the Stockport Town Centre West Mayoral Development Corporation and who would otherwise have a personal and prejudicial interest in the matter being discussed to take part in the debate and vote at the meeting.

Officer Interests

<u>Officer</u>	<u>Interest</u>
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Paul Richards	Agenda Item 7 – ‘Proposal to consult on the expansion of the boundary of Stockport Mayoral Development Corporation’ as the Chief Executive of Stockport Mayoral Development Corporation.
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3. CALL-IN

(i) Call-in of executive decision CAB519 - Independent Review of Stockport's Housing Management Arrangements

The Scrutiny Committee was informed that Executive Decision CAB519 had been 'called in' by Councillors Claire Vibert, Asa Caton and David Meller. It was reported that the matter related to the outcome of an Independent Review of Stockport's Housing Management Arrangements.

The Chair (Councillor Claire Vibert) alongside Councillors Asa Caton and David Meller attended the meeting and outlined the reason for calling-in the decision. It was noted by the Chair that the decision had followed the extraordinary Scrutiny Committee on 3 February 2025 and that the Scrutiny Committee had discussed the item at length, and that the call-in was specifically in relation to the decision not to abolish the Member Committee but to leave it in its current form.

It was highlighted by all Councillors that the decision not to abolish the Member Committee had not been fully considered by the Scrutiny Committee, and that the view of the Scrutiny Committee was that Member Committee in its current form was not working effectively in relation to Stockport housing decisions. Councillor Caton noted that there was a need for new and efficient cross-party working in scrutinising the work of Stockport Homes Group, to ensure that there was sufficient focus on outcomes for residents and on maintaining the assets the Council owns. Councillor Meller further noted that there needed to be a pragmatic approach to the discussions around Member Committee and any adjustments in respect of the Constitution.

The Chair and Councillors Asa Caton and David Meller then answered Councillors' questions in relation to their reasons for 'calling-in' the decision.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- It was noted that there needed to be an examination of all providers and not just Stockport Homes. In reply, it was noted that Stockport Homes tenants were a large part of the casework from social housing providers but that other providers should be also be examined.
- It was noted that many of the management issues raised were within officers purview to manage rather than that of Members who were there to scrutinise their work and oversee strategy matters.
- Clarification was sought as to whether this process would see a strengthening of the current Member Committee, or a different Committee created. In reply it was noted that the Member Committee in the short-term needed to sit more often to get regular updates from Stockport Homes Group and to get the more precise data that was required. It was also noted that there needed to be a more effective oversight of social housing providers when there were issues raised and over the strategic direction.
- It was noted that it was important to get the structures right following the outcomes of the Deloitte review. However, it was further noted that the call-in process seemed to try to provide a solution at the very beginning of the process of examining the current structures, and it was asked why this approach was being taken. In reply, it was noted

that the call-in was to put the right forums in place to discuss the concerns raised in the review and to implement the improvements required.

- It was asked whether the structures were in place but they weren't be utilised. In reply it was noted that this was the case to an extent, but that these structures needed to be reformatted to give greater oversight for Members and setting some of the performance indicators to hold housing providers to account.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Environment (Councillor Mark Roberts), and the Director of Place Management attended the meeting to respond to councillors' questions.

Councillor Mark Roberts explained that there may have been a misunderstanding of the decision taken by Cabinet. It was highlighted that the loss of the Member Committee was raised as a concern, and Cabinet had agreed to remove the decision to scrap the Member Committee as part of cross-party working.

It was noted that the report was the start of a longer process in order to meet the challenges from the report and to address the governance matters raised for Member Committee and Stockport Homes.

There were no comments or questions to the Cabinet Member.

The following comments were then made/ issues raised:-

- There was a need for the Member Committee to be reconstituted to provide better scrutiny of housing providers.
- There needed to be greater member oversight and to enhance working relationships to act as a 'critical friend' for Stockport Homes Group and other social housing providers.
- It was noted that the Cabinet Member responsible for Housing was not included in the motion, and it was asked how this would provide more authority for Member Committee as it was felt that some of the format changes would not significantly change the outcomes for the Committee.
- It was highlighted that the time of the Committee being duplicated from the Extraordinary Meeting was not helpful. However it was noted that there had been cross-party working at the Extraordinary Meeting by other Councillors being invited.
- It was felt that not enough time had been given to some Members to consider the recommendations being proposed in the motion.
- It was noted that the proposal would allow for all political groups to be represented whereas a Scrutiny Committee would be required to stick to the political balance of the Council.
- There was a comment that this process would allow for a discussion on the fundamental working of how social housing providers are scrutiny on a cross-party basis.
- Members needed improved oversight of an involvement in strategic housing issues and housing management for the Stockport Housing Group tenants in their ward. It was noted that a revised Member Committee would sit alongside the work of neighbourhood teams and also Area Committees proposed role in regard to casework which was being discussed by the administration.

It was then

RESOLVED - (5 for, 4 against) The Committee refers the decision CAB519 – ‘Independent Review of Stockport’s Housing Management Arrangements’ back to the Cabinet with a recommendation that they amend their original decision to reformat ‘Member Committee’ as follows:

- Renaming to Housing Committee to clarify its purpose, with an updated Terms of Reference.
- The Chair to be appointed from the main opposition group. The Chair then to be rotated every municipal year between the smaller opposition groups in order of length of time of continuous representation on the council.
- Membership from all political groups within the council.
- To meet six times a year.
- Focus to be:
 - Performance Management including assessing VfM of non-core activity
 - Scrutiny of SHG performance, with SMBC to set the Key Performance Indicators and Service Level Agreements that SHG report on
 - Shaping of delivery plan, capital programme
- Council officers to present with SHG support on strategic direction
- SHG Board Chair to attend annually
- Assuming the Council’s responsibility for SHG Board outlined in SHG’s Articles
- Focus on council home building, rough sleeping & addressing anti-social behaviour
- Compliance with the Social Housing Regulation Act and addressing the imbalance in relationship between tenant and landlord
- The Housing Committee to meet ideally a week or two weeks before the new Cabinet sub-committee so that any findings or recommendations can be fresh for consideration.
- Additional focus to include the accountability of other social housing providers operating in Stockport; issues relating to the private rented sector; homelessness and housing need.

(ii) To consider further call-in items (if any)

There were no further call-in items to consider.

4. DRAFT STOCKPORT LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

The Assistant Director Place Making & Planning presented a verbal update on which provided on the Draft Stockport Local Plan.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Environment (Councillor Mark Roberts) attended the meeting to respond to councillors’ questions.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- It was asked in relation to the Green Belt guidance, whether it could be confirmed where grey belt is designated in Stockport Borough, would developers be more able to submit applications to land of this type. It was noted in reply that the Green Belt assessment was a key piece of work to help understand the value of land within the Green Belt area from a plan making perspective and decision-making perspective. It

was noted that developers were questioning Green Belt land before the guidance. But that it was confirmed that it was for the local planning authority to determine whether an area is to be deemed as grey belt, and whether planning permission would be granted subject to usual considerations.

- There were various comments made regarding Green Belt within Stockport Borough and the value that they bring to the area.
- It was asked why the reassessment was taking place at this point and there wasn't a stronger focus on brownfield developments and urban densification in the first instance. In reply it was highlighted that the concerns raised were valid, and that the original plan proposed in summer 2024 had focussed on this route. It was noted that the current draft local plan does retain a key focus on the requirement for densification to maximise urban resources before moving to Green Belt. However, the guidance from the government had to be considered, and when demand cannot be met from the urban area, a Green Belt assessment would need to be undertaken carefully to assess what other land may be available.
- The £70,000 funding for the assessment was welcomed to undertake a thorough assessment of greenbelt land in the Borough.
- It was asked if there was a plan in place as to how best communicate with residents on how grey belt and Green Belt land would be designated given that there may be different assumptions made by the public. It was noted that this would be considered alongside considerations on how to engage and consult on the draft Local Plan. It was noted that these matters were technical in nature and would need to be considered carefully once the assessments were completed as to how they are communicated to residents.

RESOLVED - That the update be noted.

5. GREATER MANCHESTER CLEAN AIR UPDATE

The Director of Place Management submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) which provided an update on the response from government with regards to the Greater Manchester Clean Air plan.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Environment (Councillor Mark Roberts) attended the meeting to present the report and respond to question from councillors.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- It was noted that this was an important piece of work given the impacts on not only the environment but also on public health.
- There was a question on the Clean Taxi Fund and where the additional funding will come from to invest in new taxis for fleet owners. It was noted that the constructive response from the government was welcomed despite the smaller than desired level of funding received. It was noted that officers were working at a Greater Manchester level on work as to how best to support taxi drivers.
- In response to a question on communications, it was highlighted that communications on this work was important, and the existing signage needed to be removed. It was further noted that the proposed consultation on the future use of the ANPR cameras installed was welcomed to ensure there could be a discussion on the concerns raised around civil liberties.

- It was highlighted that reducing air pollution was a difficult issue even without the Clean Air Zone, specifically when it comes to funding to provide for cleaner vehicles. In reply to the comment, it was noted that the investment in Taxi-only EV charging was important to help support the transition to zero emission vehicles, with three sites currently in the borough. However, there were lessons to be learned at a Greater Manchester level for all councils on large projects such as tackling air pollution, specifically in relation to the scrapped work on the Euro 5 bus retrofit programme.

RESOLVED - That the report be noted.

6. PROPOSAL TO CONSULT ON THE EXPANSION OF THE BOUNDARY OF STOCKPORT MAYORAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) to seek comments from the Committee on the proposed consultation to expand of the boundary of the Stockport Town Centre West Mayoral Development Corporation (Stockport MDC) to the entirety of the town centre.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Environment (Councillor Mark Roberts) attended the meeting to respond to councillors' questions.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- It was noted for clarity that whilst Cabinet would be asked to endorse the proposed consultation on 28 March, the final decision would rest with the Combined Authority.
- There were many comments from Members on the new boundaries of the Stockport MDC was important to there was not a cut-off in the development of areas surrounding the new Stockport MDC boundaries. It was noted in reply that whilst there needed to be a firm boundary with the statutory legislation and this specific boundary was part of the consultation, it wouldn't prevent the social value benefits of the work in areas near to the boundary and across the borough.
- There were questions regarding the consultation and what sort of questions could be included on this. It was noted that the questions would need to be considered carefully but could allow for alternative proposals to come forward. It was affirmed that the Stockport MDC was just a part of the Council's wider regeneration programmes for areas across the Borough.
- It was commented that the work of the Stockport MDC was important and that whilst the expansion was welcomed, this should not reduce its successful targeted approach to development.
- It was noted that all Members were encouraged to participate in the consultation when it goes live.

RESOLVED - That the report be noted.

7. DRAFT FINAL REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL - DISTRICT AND LOCAL CENTRES - BEST PRACTICE AND BUILDING UPON IT

The Chair of the Scrutiny Review Panel submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) inviting the Scrutiny Committee to consider the final report of the Scrutiny

Review Panel on district and local centres and how best practice could be used to support them.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- There were several comments regarding the leadership of the Chair of the panel and thanks given for the work undertaken.
- The recommendations were welcomed as being sensible and achievable recommendations which could be applied in the Borough.
- It was suggested that further mention could be made around the promotion of Community Right to Buy as to ensure the information and resources are promoted as widely as possible.

RESOLVED – (1) That the draft ‘District and Local Centres - best practice and building upon it’ be approved and adopted.

(2) That the thanks of the Scrutiny Committee be extended to all those who took part in the Scrutiny Review.

8. 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 noted Out of Borough Placement Pilot update and Biodiversity Net Gain – Habitat Banking Vehicle items had been agreed by the Chair with officers to be deferred to a future meeting.

It was requested whether a standing item could be put into place for the Garden Waste Permit implementation that had been introduced at the Budget. The Chair noted that it would be important to keep this under review for a period of time on the agenda as a standing item.

RESOLVED - (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Assistant Director for Governance be requested to include a standing item on the agenda of future meetings of the Scrutiny Committee to monitor the implementation of the Garden Waste Permit scheme.

The meeting closed at 8.25 pm