



STOCKPORT'S NEW LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

**INITIAL SUBMISSION - DECEMBER
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INTRODUCTION

Stockport stretches from the borders of the Peak District National Park to City Centre Manchester, covering an area of 126 km². It is one of the ten metropolitan districts of Greater Manchester and lies in the south-eastern part of the conurbation at the junction of the Cheshire Plain and the Pennine foothills. The borough is a major economic player within the North West region and is home to an estimated 16,000 businesses. The population, of 280,619 (Mid 2006 estimate, ONS) is one of the most polarised within the country.

This initial brief submission reviews the cross-cutting policy challenges that have emerged from a range of recent work to establish an evidence base for the preparation of a new LAA and will inform the development of our improvement targets as will the development of the Greater Manchester Multi Area Agreement to which Stockport, as a partner within the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities, is fully committed.

KEY CHALLENGES FACING STOCKPORT

Economic Activity, Education and Skills

Stockport is a key economic player in the Manchester sub-region having a reasonably strong and vibrant economy in its own right. However, there has been relatively weaker growth in recent years; and this has meant small short-term increases in weekly earnings and small long-term increases in employment. Even so, employment rates in 2006 were around 80%, well ahead of the majority of other Greater Manchester and North West local authority areas. This high employment rate is matched by relatively low yet significant levels of benefit claimants and long-term unemployment. Youth unemployment, however, is relatively high as reflected in the number of young people not in education, employment or training.

Overall, Stockport has a highly skilled and qualified population. A high proportion of people work in managerial, technical and professional occupations although there are recognised skill shortages in the financial and professional, retail and hospitality sectors. In 2005, the knowledge based economy accounted for nearly a quarter of employment. Nevertheless, a not insignificant proportion of the working population still lack basic skills. School and college performance is at the national average and is improving.

Stockport benefits from a number of transport hubs (especially motorway junctions, railway stations, and a nearby airport). However, within the borough, problems of low accessibility arise from road congestion and, in some places, poor public transport services. Stockport experiences major two-way net out-commuting.

Key challenges in building a more competitive economy in Stockport:

- Relatively low growth trend in the local economy.
- Addressing relatively high youth unemployment and young people not in employment education or training.
- Enabling people to realise their employment potential within Stockport, in particular, retaining skilled people within the borough's economy.
- Significant proportion of the local population lacking basic skills.
- Meeting the skills shortages identified at local and sub-regional levels.
- Concentrations of worklessness in the more deprived areas.

Demography, Deprivation and Inequality, Health and Crime

Stockport has an older population than the national average. It has a higher than national average proportion of residents over 45 years old and over 65 years old and lower numbers of children and young adults. The birth rate has been relatively low by national standards but has risen in the last three years. Although the population fell slightly between 1991 and 2005, it remains generally static. The borough has a relatively small minority ethnic population although this is growing.

While average levels of prosperity are high, there are significant areas of deprivation within the borough. The disparity between these areas and the most affluent parts of the borough in relation to health, crime and quality of life is the highest for any Greater Manchester local authority. In fact, the 2001 census showed the borough to be the seventh most socially polarised of all English districts. Recent evidence from the Index of Multiple Deprivation suggests that this situation is worsening.

The average life expectancy in Stockport is higher than the national, North West and Greater Manchester averages. Levels of obesity, smoking, cancer mortality and circulatory disease mortality are all lower than the average levels at the Greater Manchester and North West levels. However they remain high in the most deprived areas of the borough. Indeed, the life expectancy gap between the wards of Bramhall and Brinnington and Central is twelve years for men and rising. Alcohol related admissions to A&E are above average.

Stockport's crime figures are lower overall than all other Greater Manchester districts, as are figures for fear of crime and perceptions of anti-social behaviour. This picture is accompanied by lower average levels of violent crime. However, when compared nationally the picture is less favourable. The borough suffers disproportionately from out of borough offenders. Residents' perceptions of community cohesion are the second highest in the country behind Cambridge although there are some tensions around crime, anti-social behaviour and associated inter-generational conflict.

Stockport benefits from strong community engagement with a long tradition of area committee working, partnership working at a local level on neighbourhood renewal issues and high overall turnout in local elections. The voluntary sector plays an increasingly important role in the borough where there is also a very strong tradition of volunteering.

Key challenges in creating a socially inclusive community in Stockport:

- Stark disparity between affluent and deprived parts of the borough means that tackling inequalities will continue to be a priority for Stockport's Local Area Agreement.
- Health inequalities - obesity, smoking, cancer mortality and circulatory disease.
- Rising impact of alcohol both on health and community safety.
- Crime, fear of crime and perceptions of anti-social behaviour.

Housing, Environment, Culture and Heritage

Stockport is one of the least affordable areas within Greater Manchester for housing, with average house prices at the end of 2006 above those for the North West and Greater Manchester but just below the national average. There are significantly high levels of owner occupied housing and this coupled with high housing costs is reflected in a high and increasing demand for social rented housing, of which there is

a relatively low stock. The proportion of housing deemed to be of poor quality is around the national average but below that of both Greater Manchester and the North West.

Stockport is a leafy borough with a high proportion of green belt and urban green space (around 55%) and a long-standing record of performance for recycling and composting. Levels of air pollution are higher than national and regional averages, largely arising from the busy road network. Stockport has a relatively large 'carbon footprint': household emissions of carbon dioxide are the fourth highest in the North West.

The borough has a proven track record in conserving its built heritage to support its ambitions for local regeneration. However, there are competing demands for non green belt land which is available for development between housing and the economy in particular.

Key challenges in improving the quality of Stockport's environment:

- Housing affordability; enabling young people and their families to set up home.
- Availability of sufficient social housing to meet increasing demands.
- A significant 'carbon footprint' arising from domestic energy use.
- Improving key aspects of localised environmental quality.
- Addressing competing land demands for both housing and economic development.

DELIVERING THE LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

The Stockport Partnership brings together voluntary, community, public and private sector organisations to work co-operatively with local communities. The role of the Partnership is to improve the quality of life for local people by setting out a long term vision for the borough, identifying local needs within neighbourhoods and pinpointing specific problems in order to design and deliver local services. The Stockport Partnership comprises:

- The Stockport Partnership Board – high-level body that will agree the sustainable community strategy and Local Area Agreement. It co-ordinates partnership working within the borough, providing direction to thematic partnerships and links with other bodies at national, regional and city-region levels.
- Thematic Partnerships – lead on key priorities for children and young people, community safety, voluntary and community activity, health and well-being, older people, economy, skills and environment.
- Public Services Commissioning Board – key local public service organisations to oversee the effective delivery of Stockport's Local Area Agreement and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public expenditure.
- The Stockport Partnership Forum – main partnership body that meets about twice a year to discuss key issues facing the borough. It aims to be as broad and inclusive as possible and has a wide membership of organisations from the voluntary, community, public and private sectors.

The new Local Area Agreement (LAA) will be the delivery plan for the Partnership's emerging Sustainable Community Strategy.

There are a number of current significant developments in the work of the Partnership that will ensure the involvement of the whole partnership in developing local ambitions for the borough and in delivering the new Local Area Agreement:

- A review of governance arrangements for the Stockport Partnership recently completed.
- Initial work on a new Sustainable Community Strategy underway, to be developed with the new Local Area Agreement.
- Work with the Local Futures Group to establish an audit of economic, social and environmental conditions in the borough.
- A Partnership Forum event on the preparation of the Local Development Framework, preceded by a number of 'State of the area debates' to explore spatial priorities at ward level.
- A State of the Borough event to discuss the key economic, social and environmental challenges with elected members and partners.
- Work underway on the establishment of a new performance management system.