

**Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 18
January 2019**

Present: Ian Parry (Chairman)

Attendance

Ron Clarke	Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf
Mike Deakin	Kyle Robinson
Keith Flunder	David Smith
Julia Jessel (Vice-Chairman)	Bernard Williams
Bryan Jones	

Also in attendance: Helen Fisher and Gill Heath

Apologies: Tina Clements, Jessica Shulman and Simon Tagg

PART ONE

34. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

**35. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 14
December 2018**

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 14 December 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

36. Countryside Estate Review – Final Proposals for Management and Delivery

The Select Committee considered the recommended approach to develop a sustainable future for Staffordshire's countryside estate, and the proposed implementation plan and associated scheme of delegation. They considered the management solutions which had been explored, in line with the four preferred delivery options previously agreed by Cabinet in October 2015, namely:

- Retain in-house with a new operating model;
- Transfer management externally;
- A partnership of landowners/managers; and
- Not-for-profit body or charitable body.

The County Council had undertaken a review of its countryside estate in order to address increasing challenges facing the service and to find a more financially sustainable delivery model. Early in this process it had been agreed by Cabinet that there would be no sale of countryside estate sites, and that the review would focus on the future management of these sites. Through the County Council's Medium Term

Financial Strategy, Rural County was currently committed to delivering further savings of £318,000 from its net operating budget from 2019/20 through to 2020/21.

Members considered a detailed report on the steps which had been taken in the review and the wide range of options which had been explored. Based on the outcomes of the options appraisal and considering how options might work in combination across the estate, three potential management proposals were identified:

Management Proposal 1 – Default Option

This approach would be to retain management of the entire estate in-house under a revised operating model. However, based on consideration of the financial sustainability of the estate and the outcomes of the appraisal, this option should include the following measures:

- a) A revised operating model through restructure of the staff unit;
- b) Development and investment in volunteering and community capacity building;
- c) Exploration of external contractual arrangements to deliver some maintenance operations where this proves cost effective;
- d) Development of income streams (e.g. car park charges at key sites, visitor centres and cafes, more effective utilisation of buildings, donations and philanthropy) and retention/ring-fencing of generated income within the service to support maintenance and improvement of sites, supporting future financial sustainability.

Management Proposal 2 – Transfer to Environment Body/Trust/In-house

Based on the outcomes of the options appraisal, this proposal would explore the transfer (a long-term lease) of the country parks and major local sites to environmental bodies as a preferred route. The first step would be to run a detailed procurement exercise to determine which sites have potential to transfer to established and suitably skilled bodies and to determine whether this is cost-effective. If a number of sites remain, the second step would be to explore the potential viability and cost of establishing a bespoke charitable body to manage the sites. Otherwise, remaining sites would be retained in-house. Under this management proposal, minor local sites, greenways and rights of way would be retained in-house, and incorporate the sustainability measures outlined in management proposal one above.

Management Proposal 3 – Transfer Management to a Trust/In-house

Under this proposal, a charitable trust/not-for-profit body would be established to manage all the country parks and major local sites via a transfer (long-term lease). The minor local sites, greenways and rights of way would be retained in-house with the sustainability measures outlined in management proposal one.

Based on the options appraisal, management proposal two was the preferred option and the Committee's views were sought on this.

A member commented that they agreed that proposal two was the best option and questioned whether officers were aware of any organisations that were willing to take this on. They expressed concern that introducing car park charges may deter people from visiting sites and that it was important to be mindful of possible negative effects. It was also queried whether the option of holiday accommodation was missing an opportunity, as this had generated a considerable source of income elsewhere, as had

music concerts and other events. Officers confirmed that there were a number of organisations that had expressed interest in the countryside estate. Work done previously, for example with the Shugborough Estate had evidenced that this could prove very successful. Many of these organisations had access to a wide range of funding which would ensure the sustainability of the Estate in the long term. In relation to car park charges, members were informed that charges had been introduced at Chasewater and this had not attracted any complaints. The key issue was to handle the introduction of charges well and keep costs at a reasonable level. The difficulty around holiday accommodation such as caravan parks or a Center Parcs style development was that the sites suitable for these were areas of highly designated environmental interest.

Concern was expressed that any proposal other than number one would mean that the County Council would lose the ability to control what happens to the estate, and that flexibility was needed to deliver across a large number of sites. Officers responded that proposal two offered significant opportunities to develop the visitor offer, whilst under proposal one the County Council had limited ability to invest in the estate. Several members spoke in support of proposal two, although a concern was raised that transfers to environmental organisations could potentially lead to restrictions on access and consequently could reduce visitor numbers.

In considering the key milestones and estimated time frames for implementation of the recommended proposal, a member commented that this seemed a long time and that he would want to see more starting now. Several members expressed concern about the possibility of the best sites being “cherry picked” and the viability of the sites that may be left in-house and also questioned the achievability of the suggested timescales. It was also important to be sure about the projected savings. Officers responded that under proposal one the timescale was realistic and the savings would be realised through staffing restructure. With regard to proposal two, the previously undertaken Expressions of Interest exercise had provided valuable insight, although a detailed piece of work would need to be undertaken to identify a sustainable way of managing sites for the future, as in the long term the County Council was unable to do this.

RESOLVED – That the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee support Management Proposal 2 – Transfer to Environment Body/Trust/In-house, whilst acknowledging that there was still a detailed piece of work to be done.

37. On-Street Parking Strategy and Forward Programme of Pay & Display Parking

Members considered the content of the proposed On-Street Car Parking Strategy, including the forward programme of on-street pay and display spaces, prior to it being issued for consultation and formally adopted.

They were informed that parking spaces were needed to help local economies grow, but providing too much parking could encourage car use and have an adverse effect on the quality of life for people living in town centres, the conditions for pedestrians, impact on traffic flow, and cause accessibility issues. The Committee had previously recognised the importance of effective management of on-street parking through civil parking

enforcement and had requested that they be provided with the opportunity to consider the proposed strategy. It was underpinned by the following core principles:

- A consistent approach to on and off-street parking;
- A well-structured regime for the management (and charging) of on-street parking;
- Parking facilities, arrangements and charging structures that reflected the needs of the individual towns (including free parking); and
- A charging structure that reflected the varying demands of all the users of the service.

Members questioned how businesses would be involved in the strategy. They were informed that initially the consultation process would involve District and Borough Councils, the Staffordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils, and businesses at a strategic level but would then be aimed at a local level at the implementation stage. Members suggested that Chambers of Trade and Railway Stations should be added to the list of proposed consultees. They stressed the importance of the consultation being all-encompassing and involving local communities, local residents and local businesses and welcomed the reference to supporting town centres. It was also suggested that there should be liaison with other operators of car parks in order to provide a co-ordinated approach to manage the resource overall. The Cabinet Member confirmed that this consultation would take place and that it was crucial to adopt the right approach.

Members expressed concerns over parking on footpaths and verges and were assured that these issues would be included within the strategy. In relation to enforcement, a member commented that it would be helpful to give the Police and PCSOs the power to move vehicles which were causing an obstruction. They queried whether additional staff would need to be employed to manage additional car parking spaces. Officers responded that Pay and Display parking was easier to enforce and would use the same enforcement resource but in a different way.

It was queried how a balance was struck between encouraging more vehicles into town centres and the impact that this would have on air quality and it was suggested that it would be helpful to include an environmental group in the consultation exercise. Officers responded that the increase in parking spaces involved fairly small numbers which would create a marginal disadvantage to air quality. In conclusion, a member commented that there was clearly a link between the availability of convenient parking and high streets which were thriving, and the importance of supporting these.

RESOLVED – That the comments and suggestions of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee contribute to the consultation on the On-Street Car Parking Strategy and forward programme on on-street pay and display spaces.

38. Staffordshire Safer Roads Partnership

The Committee considered details of the new governance structure and operating model of the Staffordshire Safer Roads Partnership (SSRP). Members also received details of a wide range of initiatives used to promote road safety across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent with reference to the four Es: education, engagement, engineering

and enforcement, which supported a wider culture change that would see excessive speed and inconsiderate behaviour on roads as socially unacceptable.

As part of the new governance arrangements implemented in 2016 two boards were established:

- The Strategic Board, which sets the strategic direction of the Partnership and, working with recommendations from the Operational Board, takes ultimate responsibility for key financial decision and scrutiny. Membership includes senior political representatives from the main Partner organisations.
- The Operational Board reviews current local issues across the whole spectrum of road safety to inform recommendations submitted to the Strategic Board.

The Chairman commented that he welcomed the work of the Partnership and acknowledged that it had been very successful. However, he expressed concern over its visibility and lack of public scrutiny. In examining the governance model, accounts and budget it was evident that it was a self-funding organisation. He queried where the funding came from and commented that if this was predominantly from educational course referrals it was potentially a concern that it was a business model dependent on people being caught speeding. Officers responded that enforcement activity was not driven by a desire to create income, and that enforcement was managed carefully and proportionately. The Chairman commented that it would be helpful to have a level of transparency, assurance and understanding for the public that cameras and mobile cameras were put in places of concern around safety, rather than the focus being on income generation. Officers confirmed that the location of cameras was based upon collision data and in response to concerns raised by the community. It was suggested that, in the genuine interest of safety, the locations of cameras could be advertised. In relation to a query about cameras being on or off, officers confirmed that there were periodic reviews on collision statistics and cameras would be activated in areas of recent collisions.

In considering data on collisions it was noted that this information covered the whole of the County and it was suggested that it would be useful to know variations and blackspots for specific areas. It was also queried whether there would be a focus on unclassified roads for the future. Queries were also raised about the issue of cyclist using pavements and HGVs speeding at night. Officers pointed out that areas were continually emerging as data was collected and analysed.

In relation to the Staffordshire's Road Safety Grant fund which was launched in 2017 a member queried whether action had been taken to promote this. The Cabinet Member undertook to send information on this to members. In response to concerns raised about the lack of transparency and openness on the SSRP website, for example that it contained no information on the governance structure or budget, the Cabinet Member pointed out that this was currently being developed.

RESOLVED – That the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee will continue to scrutinise the Staffordshire Safer Roads Partnership.

39. Work Programme

The Select Committee received a copy of their Work Programme for 2018/19. They noted that the item on Post 18 Education Provision would be considered at their meeting on 25 April 2019, and that an additional item, Community Learning Annual Self-Assessment and 2019-2023 Strategy and Priorities, would also be brought to that meeting.

RESOLVED – That the above additions/amendments to the Work Programme 2018/19 be agreed.

40. Exclusion of the Public

RESOLVED – That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business which involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Schedule 12A (as amended) of the Local Government Act 1972 indicated below.

41. Update on Section 53 Applications

(Exemption paragraph 5)

Chairman