

Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 25 April 2019

Present:

Attendance

Tina Clements	Jessica Shulman
Keith Flunder	David Smith
Julia Jessel (Vice-Chairman)	Simon Tagg
Kyle Robinson	Bernard Williams

Also in attendance: Philip White

Apologies: Ron Clarke, Mike Deakin, Bryan Jones, Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf and Ian Parry

PART ONE

51. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

52. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 1 March 2019

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 1 March 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Vice Chairman.

53. Community Learning Annual Self-Assessment & 2019-2023 Strategy and Priorities

The Committee considered the Annual Self-Assessment of the Community Learning Service. Members were also asked to approve the Community Learning Strategy and priorities for the Service for 2019-2023.

Members were informed that the Skills and Employability Service focused on a range of education and training opportunities to meet the needs of learners, the economy and the wider community, and supported delivery of the LEP priorities. The report to the Committee was about the Community Learning provision that the Service provided in Staffordshire. The portfolio of work included Community Learning and adult classroom-based learning. Members were asked to comment on the annual performance of the Community Learning provision, in order to further improve quality, outcomes for learners and in remaining a good learning provider.

Members were informed that the Service had engaged with 4658 learners over the past year, with a diverse range of providers around the County. The quality of the provision was very good, with the Service's own assessment based on the Ofsted framework, showing that 97% of the sessions were judged good or better. Over the past few years

the provision had had more of a leisure learning focus than the Service would like moving forward, and had been highlighted by the Committee the previous year. The focus of the new Strategy was on the County Council's Strategic Priorities, in particular assisting care leavers, adults with low skills particularly in English and Maths, working with people who had learning disabilities or mental health issues, those on state benefits and those from minority ethnic groups who struggled to access employment. A further focus was on families and family learning. Another Strategic priority was around health and emotional well-being.

The Committee considered details of how funding would be used and noted that there was a shift to direct it towards the priorities outlined. Leisure, health and wellbeing were now all grouped together, with the emphasis being on the health and wellbeing element. There would be an investment of £6m from the ESFA over the four-year period.

Members commented that they were pleased to see the Strategy aligned to the Council's Strategic Priorities, specifically in relation to employment and better paid jobs and the focus on digital skills development but asked if the targets were challenging enough. A member raised several questions in relation to Family English, Maths and Language and emphasised the importance of this for families where parents struggled to help their children. It had been recognised that the Family Learning provision in previous years had been underperforming and it was acknowledged that while the number of enrolments were smaller for 2017-18 the quality of provision was now a lot better. There was now a better relationship with schools, whereas previously the Service had relied on sub-contractors. For the forthcoming year £200,000 would be invested in this area, which would expand the provision. There were also more schools engaged with providing the courses and the intention was to increase this and encourage schools to interact more with their communities and not just focus on delivering their school curriculum. For future years funding would be based on demand and if necessary this could be re-prioritised.

In response to a question about the discrepancy between the number of learners and number of enrolments it was confirmed that some learners do progress through courses. It was also questioned why the enrolments for leisure were so high, and for STEM so low, as this would seem to be an area to create opportunities for people to move into employment. Also, in relation to the District Analysis, Moorlands and Lichfield were not meeting their targets and it was asked if there was anything which could be done to address this. In terms of leisure learning it was reiterated that this point was raised the previous year, and this had been taken on board. Members were informed that the purpose of leisure learning was usually about keeping older people active. Nevertheless, provision had shifted away from that in recognition of the point which had been made by the Committee that the focus should be on Strategic Plan objectives and resources were now being directed at STEM subjects.

With regard to targets, a member commented that these should be achievable but should be challenging and asked if targets were being reviewed to ensure that these were challenging and that the Service could demonstrate that they were aiming to achieve an increase in performance. It was queried why the district enrolment targets were significantly less than in previous years, when the aim should be to make progress year on year. In the light of the shift in emphasis under the new Strategy, which was very welcome, it would be appropriate to set a new set of targets. The Cabinet Member

pointed out that the targets reflected the change in terms of the new programme and new suppliers for year one. However, he assured members that he would take on board their comments on this and would be challenging these targets. Also, when returning next year and presenting targets for year two of the plan the Committee would be able to be very challenging because these would be the targets set once the Service had been through the change programme. There would need to be a focus on those districts where there was a low take up.

It was agreed that utilising the local knowledge of Community Cabinet Support Members and undertaking a piece of work to market test areas would be helpful in clarifying access to courses and local need. Officers also agreed to consider working with Work Clubs (in South Staffordshire) to see if more could be done to help young people access employment.

With regard to the Self-Assessment, it was confirmed that this used a pre-determined set of standard questions. In the light of the new Strategy it was suggested that it would be helpful to have more locally derived supplementary questions to test how successfully it was working and provide more informed feedback. Members were informed that this would be the case and the questioning would be expanded, and in addition visits would be made to providers.

The Strategy referred to more work being done around market testing and marketing courses and how people access them. A member queried what would be done differently that hadn't previously and asked how the new marketing strategy would reach out to people. Members were informed that the Service had taken a lot of learning from the Career Learning Pilot which had been undertaken, around how to engage with people.

RESOLVED That:

- a) The performance and quality assurance of the Skills and Employability's Community Learning Service, through the Annual Self-Assessment Report and areas for improvement be noted; and
- b) The comments of the Select Committee on the Community Learning Strategy and priorities for the Service for 2019-2023 be taken into consideration by the Cabinet Member for Learning and Employability and help to shape the Strategy.

54. Career Learning Pilot Presentation

The Committee received a presentation on the Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Career Learning Pilot. Staffordshire had been one of six pilot areas selected by the DfE to participate in the pilot, which was aimed at supporting the Government's ambition for an adult education system that helps people upskill and reskill throughout their working lives. It was intended to drive up skills levels of people in work and help to improve productivity. It presented Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire LEP with an opportunity to test out new approaches to improving skills of the workforce in the LEP area. Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire LEP and partners had worked together to develop and design the pilot to meet local labour and market needs. The pilot qualifications (level 3 and above) could only be delivered by partners who already had Advanced Learner Loan facilities and premises in Staffordshire. The key things the DfE wanted to test as part of these pilots were: how best to reach adults who are in work and low skilled, or close to

returning to the labour market, this also included the use of face-to-face career guidance by the National Career Service; and whether reducing the cost of courses made targeted adults more likely to do economically valuable learning matched to local need. Key target audiences were selected and key messages put out to those target groups.

Members received details of campaign activities; priority sectors, qualifications and discounts; delivery partners; delivery plan costs; risks and mitigations; and issues and barriers. They were informed that the evaluation would focus on different outreach and engagement approaches. Initial feedback had suggested that the pilot in the Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire LEP area had been one of the most successful. The pilot in Staffordshire had tested the County Council being the lead marketing authority, whilst in other areas national bodies had been used to market the courses. The success of the pilot in Staffordshire demonstrated that the local authority was a trusted messenger in our communities, as opposed to a national organisation without a good local understanding. The pilot had shown that local marketing campaigns, using a broad range of different means, did have an effect in generating interest. A significant item of feedback was that cost was a key issue and people were very concerned about burdening themselves with debt in order to learn, so the offer to reduce the cost in order to encourage people to access training was key.

Members asked what the next steps would be, following the pilot. They were informed that the results would be available in September to indicate how many learners had actually completed courses. Members commented that it was important for adults of any background to be able to engage with learning and that there are certain skills which were lacking in the County, such as money management. They suggested the provision of simple courses which help people manage life better. It was acknowledged that the skills agenda had many facets to it and it was about the total offer and how it connected and fitted together that was important. For this pilot it was specifically about getting people to access qualifications at level 3 (A level equivalent) or above, so was reaching out to people who already had a core basic skill level, and encouraging them to upskill to hopefully impact on their aspirations and their career development.

A member commented that as a greater proportion of the workforce were self-employed or small businesses these would be the individuals who would find it difficult to upskill, not just due to the financial commitment but the time commitment, and expressed surprise that there wasn't an emphasis on different types of models of accessing learning to fit the individual. For small businesses or self-employed people the issue was around managing time which made it difficult to fit in with the more rigid timetable of more formal courses. For our local economy it was important to think about how we encourage self-employed small businesses to expand. Members were informed that under the pilot the LEP area was restricted in the number of courses that were approved for a discount by the DfE, and consequently could not choose qualifications that met local needs better, such as vacancies or future demand. A fundamental flaw had been that the courses had to be completed in 12 months and this was not possible on a part-time basis for learners in full-time employment. A member commented that it would be helpful to be able to offer courses on a bite-size modular basis. The Cabinet Member confirmed that there would be a number of changes which would be made should the programme be given back to the local authority to deliver on a rolling basis, or that when the DfE bring the national training programme forward the learning from the pilot will

enable the Authority to deliver it very well and will be able to have some influence and credit with them in terms of being a strong partner.

The Chairman requested that feedback be provided for the Committee when the results were received in September.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) The presentation be received; and
- b) Feedback on the results in September be provided to the Select Committee via a Briefing Note.

55. Work Programme

The Committee considered their Work Programme for 2018/19 and were thanked for their contribution to this. Members were informed that the draft Work Programme for 2019/20 would be brought to the next meeting, but that this currently reflected a considerable range and volume of work. Consequently they were encouraged to consider innovative ways in which this might be managed, for example via a number of Working Groups, to ensure that thorough and effective scrutiny would take place. It was agreed that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman would meet with officers in the near future for initial discussions on this.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) The Work Programme for 2018/19 be noted;
- b) The Chairman and Vice-Chairman will meet with officers for initial discussions on the draft Work Programme for 2019/20; and
- c) The draft Work Programme for 2019/20 will be brought for consideration to the next meeting of the Select Committee in June.

Chairman