

Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 18 June 2020

Present: Ian Parry (Chairman)

Attendance

Tina Clements (Vice-Chairman)	Kyle Robinson
Keith Flunder	Jessica Shulman
Syed Hussain	David Smith
Julia Jessel	Simon Tagg
Ian Lawson	Bernard Williams
Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf	

Also in attendance: Philip White and Mark Winnington

Apologies: Mike Deakin

PART ONE

80. Apologies

81. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

82. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 17 January 2020

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 17 January 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

83. The Effects of Covid-19 on Further Education

Karen Dobson, principal and chief executive of Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group (NSCG), attended the meeting to assist members in their consideration of this item. The Committee were informed that some of the the issues were around sustainability in access, the development of remote learning and the challenge of returning back to full-time in the Autumn. Members queried the situation in relation to apprenticeships and it was confirmed that this was an area of concern. Whilst vacancies had not been lost, there was a 30-70% decline in appropriate provision for next year. Members commented that there was a broad range of approaches in the way teaching was being delivered and queried consistency. However, it was pointed out that the FE sector was independent of local authority control and the matter was for each college to decide. Nevertheless, innovation was encouraged together with sharing best practice, challenges and learning.

It was acknowledged that areas of deprivation had a negative impact on attainment. GCSE and A levels would be delivered on a moderated basis, which was already happening. There was concern that the awarding of grades may be too generous. In relation to deprivation, members were informed that there were questions around how many pupils accessed learning via mobile phones when other devices were not available to them. Should a blended or remote approach be adopted next year this would be a cause of concern. It was commented that the Government had provided laptops to children and queried whether this could be extended to the FE sector. It was agreed that the Committee recommend this to the Cabinet Member for Learning and Employability, who confirmed that he was happy to consult with College Principals. Another option was to look at streaming on TV channels. Concerned about households who only have one device that needs to be used by 2 or 3 people.

A member expressed concern over the closure of buildings which offered quiet spaces to study for students who are unable to do this at home. It was confirmed that libraries were beginning to reopen (beginning with the three biggest libraries).

Government issue is that housing is the responsibility of District Councils. Happy to talk to student groups who are already talking to their providers. In response to a question about student absences, the principal confirmed that staff follow-up these with phone calls and emails. Kept Newcastle site open (if students can't study at home). The lecturers know the individual students' backgrounds. The concern was with a new cohort of students is that there was no rapport or background knowledge.

The cabinet member confirmed that there are unpredictable numbers for next year and it would be important to keep oversight and understanding of the situation.

RESOLVED – That the oral update be noted.

84. Economic Recovery, Renewal and Transformation Strategy

Alan Rogers, chief exec. of LEP was in attendance to assist members in their consideration of this item. In January, Staffordshire had been in a good place with the economy growing. However, COVID had a significant effect with that but brought both challenges and opportunities. The strategy had been taken through cabinet the previous day. Members were informed that Staffordshire's main strengths were: It's people; the fact that it was well connected; good productivity; environmental improvement; and skills.

The strategy was now in it's respond phase with the government providing funding to districts of £500,000 for micro-business grants. Over £900,000 was being invested into enterprise centres to help business start-ups. £36,000 was being invested into business start-up schemes. Which will involve a minimum of 200 businesses over the next 3 years. It would be necessary to have good infrastructure to support these additional sites in Staffordshire.

Alan Rogers expressed the view that he was confident Staffordshire will be resilient. He confirmed that a weekly COVID taskforce was being held. He was grateful for the partnership working as that had improved across the LEP. Local Industrial Strategy had

been the foundation for this strategy. Work was taking place on the implementation of the plan to be signed off at the end of July. The focus was respond, recovery, renewal and resilience.

A member commented that this document was not the only weapon. Do we know enough to target the resource to effect that recovery phase. Government given clear direction that this be targeted at “good businesses”. Members were informed that pre-covid the number of people homeworking were 12% and that figure had now increased to 49%. The cabinet member for economic growth reassured members that those businesses which were not going to be successful were being encouraged to upskill and redirect. There were concerns around the hospitality sector and the cabinet member would be meeting with the MPs to discuss the large organisations in this category in Staffordshire.

A member said there was underinvestment in areas outside the south-east. COVID had created unprecedented partnerships in public sector procurement. Members were informed that this was a strategic living document. Used to support local business. Significant implications from working from home, broadband, cars, public transport going forward. There were likely to be office closures rather than opening, limiting big sheds and changes to the design of houses to include an office, and unlikely to have big logistical sheds in the future. Member said it was difficult to predict and judge future trends. Digital sector, pre-covid, 59% working from home.

The cabinet member clarified that in order to receive small business funding the criteria is that they must employ less than nine people. A member commented that it would be important to concentrate on the businesses that would do well and not on those that were failing pre-Covid.

RESOLVED – That the Economic, Recovery, Renewal and Transformation Strategy be noted.

85. Work Programme

Members considered their work programme for 2020/21 and noted that the report on air quality was to be taken to Cabinet and the Cabinet member had requested to attend the scrutiny meeting to be held in September. They also noted that the work programme was to be discussed in the near future and would be subject to review.

RESOLVED – That the above arrangements be noted

86. Exclusion of the Public

87. Exempt Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 17 January 2020

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 17 January 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

Chairman