

Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 12 November 2020

Present: Ian Parry (Chairman)

Attendance

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

Also in attendance: Mark Deaville, Julia Jessel, Jonathan Price, David Williams, Victoria Wilson and Stuart Haynes (Save Cannock Chase Action Group)

Apologies: Alastair Little

PART ONE

99. Declarations of Interest

Simon Tagg declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 5: North Staffordshire Local Air Quality Plan (NSLAQP) – Outline Business Case

100. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 17 September 2020

RESOLVED That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2020 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

Note by Clerk:

Minute 95 - There had been considerable debate around the imminent end of the Furlough scheme but Government had since agreed to extend the scheme.

Minute 97 - Drainage maps should be shared with Parish Councils

101. Draft SEND Strategy and Draft Accessibility Strategy

The Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND) presented the draft SEND Strategy and the draft Accessibility Strategy. The SEND Working Group had been invited to the meeting.

The Select Committee had been tasked with reviewing the draft strategies and providing feedback. The SEND Strategy set out how the County Council, along with the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG) and partners (including education and health providers)

would work together to provide services and support for children and young people aged 0-25 with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities and their families. The Accessibility strategy was a strategy for increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the school curriculum; improving the physical environment of schools to enable them to better take advantage of education; and, to improve delivery of information to disabled pupils. The two strategies were interlinked.

The Cabinet Member described the progress to date in terms of engagement with stakeholders and identified priorities and themes for further consultation and taking it forward.

Members welcomed the two documents but recognised that to be effective there must be full engagement from all partners. A Member asked to what extent schools were engaged given that during the drafting of the documents they had had (and continue to have) periods of closure due to the pandemic. The Cabinet Member was confident that schools wanted the very best for all their pupils, he maintained a close working relationship with schools and continued to work with SENCOs when schools were closed.

A Member referred to the Autism Outreach Team (AOT) who had requested change to the scope of involvement to 25 years. Transition to adult services at 18 years is very difficult for some young people. She asked for free training to be available to SEND school governors as well as for SENCOs and for best practice to be shared around the county. This was currently difficult to access and as high quality governance was key to school improvement, upskilling SEND governors to ensure they are asking the right questions of schools would be integral to implementing the strategy. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that all schools had a budget for training and he would look into facilitating the Members request. He agreed to look into the request of the AOT.

Some members questioned how engaged schools were with the Strategies. A Member asked to what extent parents had been involved. The Cabinet Member said that the Strategy was aspirational and underlying it would be an implementation plan. The Strategies would be launched in January 2021 with implementation plans to follow. Where schools are reluctant to engage, the authority could ultimately resort to Regional School Commissioners. Further, parents would be involved at the launch of the Strategy which aims to strengthen relationships between the local authority, schools and parents. A Parents and Carers Hub was due to go live shortly and would facilitate two-way communication. The Assistant Director for Education Strategy and Improvement acknowledged that parent groups had helped to shape the draft Strategies and would be involved in their implementation. Members were reminded that the Strategies were co-produced and all partners would have an important role in delivery.

A Member asked about the cost of building adaptations and hoped the County Council was able to accommodate necessary work. The Cabinet Member said that in all new builds such matters were taken into account. Government had provided an additional £2m for school improvement and some of this will fund physical changes to buildings.

A Member asked about the assessment period of 20 weeks and whether that could be reduced. The Cabinet Member said that it was a 20 week maximum period and sometimes to be thorough it needed that time. He acknowledged that the historic

backlog had reduced and 80% compliance would be achieved by the end of the year. EHCPs were now completed in a timely manner but he would not want the process speeded up at the expense of quality.

The Chairman thanked the SEND Working Group for their time in attending the Select Committee

RESOLVED That the Select Committee's feedback on the draft Strategies – appreciated by the Cabinet Member would be taken on board.

102. North Staffordshire Local Air Quality Plan (NSLAQP) - Outline Business Case

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport introduced the North Staffordshire Local Air Quality plan – outline business case. His report set out work undertaken to develop the NSLAQP which would deliver the primary aim of achieving compliance with the standard for safe NO₂ concentrations limit of 40ug/m³ (annual average) in the shortest time possible.

A presentation from the Project Manager explained how the outline business plan supported the preferred option which would, subject to Cabinet approval, be submitted to Government to fund a package of interventions on the highway designed to address illegal exceedances of Nitrogen Dioxide by 2023.

Of the three exceedance locations identified in north Staffordshire, only one was along the A53 in Newcastle for which the County Council was the responsible Highways Authority. The preferred option was selected as it would deliver compliance most effectively and quickly and involved the introduction of a bus gate at peak periods on the Etruria Road (A53). Due to the pandemic, Government had allowed an additional year to achieve compliance.

The preferred option and analysis would be presented to the three Cabinets before the full business case would be submitted to Government. Implementation would take place 2021/22.

The local member was pleased that the preferred option would avoid the fall back solution which would have been the introduction of a chargeable clean air zone and damaging to the local economy.

A Member asked about the implications for the A53 further into Werrington and whether there would be any changes to bus routes as a consequence. The Project Manager said that there should be no major traffic management impact, any changes would be minor and there would be liaison with any affected neighbouring districts.

A Member asked about other parts of the county where there may be exceedance to safe air quality limits. The Connectivity Strategy Manager said that in other parts of the county where Air Quality Management Areas were declared based on a similar standard, they were being addressed through interventions included within the relevant District Integrated Transport Strategy.

RESOLVED That the Select Committee was satisfied that the business case had been properly prepared and due process had taken place.

103. Mitigation Proposals for Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture introduced the Mitigation Proposals for Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC). She explained the rationale for the proposals - to address recreational pressures associated with housing growth and to consider the implications for the County Council. The County Council owns over 90% of the SAC and the plans had management implications for the Country Park.

The Environmental Advice Manager delivered a presentation on the plans. The mitigation proposals included a range of on-site measures across the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to reduce pressure on the most sensitive habitats, improve infrastructure and facilities in more robust locations and raise public awareness of the sensitivity of the site.

Over 30,000 new homes were planned across seven local authority areas within 15km of the SAC (an area which currently accounts for 75% of visitors). Planning authorities are required to ensure the impact of any development is mitigated and have developed a collaborative and joined up approach to mitigation. She described the key considerations as rationalising the car parks; an options appraisal of the Chase Road to include consultation; and a more informed site user plan encouraging better use of the Marquis Drive site with scope to improve services there. The plan would be for 10-15 year delivery and a flexible approach.

Stuart Haynes, of Save Cannock Chase Action Group addressed the Select Committee as a key witness and asked for wider public consultation on the plans before their submission to Cabinet. He believed there was widespread opposition from user groups and from Cannock Chase District Council. He believed the evidence base for the proposals to be out of date and that elderly and disabled users of the Chase would be disadvantaged by the proposed car parking arrangements. He recognised the need to protect the SAC and mitigate against environmental damage but maintained that many people wanted to be involved in developing a plan.

The Environmental Advice Officer confirmed that any surplus funds generated by the pay and display car parks on County Council land, after maintaining the car parks, would be ring fenced to improving the country park. She explained that measures would be put in place to avoid anti-social behaviour/parking on verges and pavements before the new parking arrangements would be introduced.

A Member urged any further mitigation proposals to involve Voluntary Groups. A Member was mindful that wider consultation with many groups was likely to encompass conflicting views but he felt there needed to be a re-examination of consultation to date recognising the complexity of the many stakeholders to achieve a balanced view. However, as custodians of Cannock Chase country park, the County Council had a duty to enact Mitigation Plans to protect it.

Members acknowledged that local residents had clearly voiced their concern and appealed for wider consultation to allow them to shape future Mitigation Plans. The

Select Committee acknowledged that the public should be encouraged to access and enjoy Cannock Chase but were mindful of the demonstrated need to protect the SAC.

The Chairman thanked Mr Haynes for his time in attending the Select Committee as a key witness.

RESOLVED: That (a) the Select Committee accept the need for mitigating action to protect the SAC but mindful of the frustration of some user groups, ask the Cabinet Member to look again at the consultation which has taken place (by the SAC) and reconsider whether it was sufficiently robust and inclusive, particularly regarding car parking,

(b) The Cabinet Member report back to the Select Committee in the New Year.

104. Household Waste Recycling Centre Contract - Re-Procurement

Cabinet Member for Commercial Matters presented his proposals for re-procurement of the Household Waste Recycling Centre Contract. He asked the Select Committee to consider the desired contract outcomes suggested in his report and indicate whether they are the correct ones and/or if there are any omissions. The current interim contract for the management of the Household Waste Recycling Centres would end on the 29 March 2022.

It was intended to commence a procurement exercise in early 2021 to secure a provider from 30 March 2022. The County Council has a statutory duty to arrange for the disposal of household waste and some 500,000 tonnes of household waste is generated per annum by the c330,000 households and around 66,000 tonnes of this waste is collected via the network of Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) network. The aim of the scheme was to capture household waste that could be recycled rather than recovered by sending to one of the Waste to Energy plants at Four Ashes and Hanford.

The Cabinet Member said that his focus was on customer care, quality of service and value for money. Waste Disposal Authorities in England traditionally use the 2 main procurement models of in-house or fully out-sourced and his report described advantages and disadvantages of the various options including hybrid arrangements.

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change supported the comprehensive list of options and analysis and explained that responsibility for contract delivery was in the portfolio of the Cabinet Member for Commercial Matters, responsibility for service delivery was her responsibility. She wanted a contract to be flexible and acknowledged that Waste Management would be increasingly important in the future with a focus on managing and reducing.

Members appreciated the opportunity to comment on the proposed options and warned against the decision based on cost alone. The Cabinet Member assured members that he would take into account the excellent work being done at the various centres currently and was focussed as much as on quality as value for money.

Members were mindful of sites which worked well and others which were heavily over-used and not fit for purpose. They supported a flexible arrangement which looked to

utilise and manage waste better and which would be effective and competitive whilst offering excellent customer service and quality.

RESOLVED That the Select Committee supports the approach of the Cabinet Member looking to re-procure the Household Waste Recycling Centre Contract and request that he return with proposals in the New Year.

105. Work Programme

The Committee agreed to include items on LCWIP (Cycling and Walking) and Live Labs to their meeting on 26 February 2021.

RESOLVED That the changes to the Work programme be noted.

Chairman