

Minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 17 January 2023

Present: Colin Greatorex (Chair)

Attendance

Charlotte Atkins	Jeremy Pert
Tina Clements	Bob Spencer
Mike Davies	Samantha Thompson (Vice-Chair (Overview))
John Francis	Mike Worthington
Kath Perry, MBE	

Also in attendance: Councillors (virtual attendance).

Alun Rodgers, Chair, SSLEP and Andy Devaney, Interim Chief Executive SSLEP.

Cllrs McKiernan (East Staffs Borough Council) and Wilcox (Lichfield District Council) both attended for the LEP report.

Officers: John Tradewell and Zach Simister Gill Heath and Bernard Peters

Apologies: Gill Heath and Bernard Peters

PART ONE

47. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Francis declared that he was a member of the Business Innovation Centre.

48. Minutes of meeting held on 12 December 2022

Resolved: – That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

49. Overview and Scrutiny Committees - Work Programmes

The Chairman introduced the report and reminded the Committee that as part of its role as overarching overview and scrutiny (O&S) committee, they had responsibility for developing and agreeing the combined work programme for the Council's overview and scrutiny function.

Each of the Committee Chairmen briefly outlined the items in their work programmes for the next three months. It was reported that the Health O&S Committee had been concentrating on GP access; system pressures; Social Care reforms; and the effect of the cost-of-living situation on people's health.

The following issues were also raised as requiring further discussion at the next O&S Chair and Vice Chairs Forum:

- O&S reports being pulled from agendas at the last minute.
- Reports not containing the information requested.
- Cabinet responses to recommendations made by committees not being received.
- The performance of Avanti and its impact on Staffordshire.

Resolved:

- a) That the O&S Committee work programmes be noted.
- b) That the following issues be raised at the next O&S Chair and vice chairs forum.
 - Reports being pulled from agendas at the last minute.
 - Reports not containing the information requested.
 - Cabinet responses to recommendations made by committees not being received.
 - The performance of Avanti and its impact on Staffordshire.

50. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022-2027 Working Group - Final Report

The Committees Working group had been established to scrutinise the Council's budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

The Groups final report set out details of the work undertaken between September 2022 and January 2023; their conclusions; and their recommendations for submission to Cabinet on 25 January 2023.

The working group had concentrated on three areas of business, that being: Capital (programme and assets); Reserves; and SEND Transport. 17 recommendations had been made which were listed in the report.

The Chairman of the Working Group, Councillor Greatorex had been invited to attend the Cabinet meeting to present the findings.

With regards to the SEND area of work, it was felt that work needed to be done quickly and the report did not emphasise the urgency of the task. The Committee asked for the review (recommendation 10) to be carried out urgently and that the review of routes (recommendation 12) be carried out on a regular and frequent basis.

It was felt that prior to the Government settlement being announced at the end of December 2022, the County Council had been proposing to use £20m from reserves on top of the savings proposed in the MTFS. The working groups scrutiny had therefore been on how robust this plan was. It was now presumed that as there was an unexpected extra £37.8m in Government funding, this meant that the £20m was presumably no longer needed from reserves. There was also £4.2m in the budget for market sustainability and the cost of care in Social Care. As this was now delayed, it was proposed that this (£4.8m and £20m reserves) could be an opportunity to invest in Highway/Capital improvements in the same way as that proposed in 2021/22, as this could save money in the long term. The Committee agreed to add this recommendation to those listed in the report.

The Committee discussed the problem of 'short termism' and due to the nature of funding bid criteria and the short notice of funding opportunities, it meant that schemes were being pulled together at very short notice without the right level of thought given to the long term effects.

Resolved:

a) That, subject to the following amendments, the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) working Group report and recommendations, be approved and submitted to the Cabinet at their meeting on 25 January 2023:

i. An additional recommendation 18 to read:

Priority area discussed at Corporate O&S - post settlement

In view of the £37.8m additional government settlement announcement, which may allow for the £20m draw on reserves to no longer be needed, along with the Government scheme delay affecting £4.2m in the 'budget for market sustainability and cost of care' in Social Care, there were options to invest. A sum could be committed as investment in Highway/Capital improvements (in the same way as that proposed last year), as this would save money in the long term.

ii. Recommendation 10 be amended to read:

That the Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND) prioritise the SEND Transport review and consider if timelines can be moved forward. ***This should be a priority and addressed early in the financial year.***

iii. Recommendation 12 be amended to read:

That consideration be given to a review of allocating SEND transport provision on an annual basis to reduce the number of single route taxis. We questioned whether the system used by SCC for route calculation was best in class or whether a more modern system may be beneficial. ***Routing reviews should also be carried out on a regular and frequent basis e.g. each academic year.***

b) That the wording of the amendments in the report be approved by the Chair.

51. Scrutiny Review of Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership 2021-22

The meeting was attended by Alun Rodgers, Chair, SSLEP and Andy Devaney, Interim Chief Executive SSLEP.

The Committee considered the report and presentation of the Chair, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SSLEP) regarding the operation and performance of the Partnership during 2021/22.

The National Framework stated that LEPs should participate in relevant Local Authority scrutiny arrangements to guarantee the effective and appropriate democratic scrutiny of their investment decisions. Furthermore, SSLEP's Assurance Framework provided that scrutiny should be undertaken annually via joint arrangements between relevant Local Authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

Stoke on Trent City Council and all District and Borough Councils had been invited to the meeting. Cllrs McKiernan (East Staffs Borough Council) and Wilcox (Lichfield District Council) both attended the meeting and were able to speak and ask questions.

During his presentation Mr Devaney highlighted:-

- The purpose of their attendance at the meeting.
- The function of SSLEP.
- The composition of SSLEP's Board.
- The national LEP review.
- SSLEP's governance structures.
- SSLEP's Delivery Plan for 2021/22.
- SSLEP's programme management.
- The recommendations contained in the LEP annual report 2021/22

During the discussion, Members asked questions and sought clarification of various matters. The following information was gathered:-

- In relation to the targets set by the SSLEP, it was explained that indicators covered different time periods so some sets of data were delayed in collating/recording data (e.g. Gross Value Added GVA). This meant that reporting dates didn't always match.
- Measuring GVA over the last 2 years had been difficult both locally and nationally because of the economic slowdown. The method used was nationally recognised.
- A district member commented that in their opinion scrutiny of the LEP was not frequent enough and of a sufficient level of depth.
- A SITREP was a 'Situation Report' and was a point in time intelligence report and covered a geographical and business range.
- In order to ensure that Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent businesses received the opportunities and help they need, the LEP would provide advice, information and guidance to maximise growth potential.
- Changing roles of SSLEP meant that they would be far more proactive in the role of representing local business across Staffordshire and providing advice/

guidance. There was a desire to grow and develop support and guidance for businesses to help them to invest and grow.

- The Enterprise hub bid from Tamworth had been withdrawn so could not have been considered by the SSLEP.
- Projects were brought forward by partners and then shortlisted using agreed criteria that was consistent across the whole of the County. Some areas seemed to benefit disproportionately but this was due to strength of business cases and not down to any regional bias.
- Some members questioned the funding in the north of the county which they felt had benefited at the detriment of the south. It was explained that there was a whole Staffordshire approach to development and no single area was targeted more than any other. Schemes came forward from all areas and if they met the criteria, went forward for government approval. Independent advisors were used to assess applications. Final approval was given by Government.
- Officers in every district were contacted and advised to ensure that everyone had an equal chance. Monthly meetings were held, and Board meeting minutes were available online which recorded attendance.
- The networking of network meetings was one of the ways the LEP could offer leadership and provide real business intelligence and understand the data and help to deliver programmes.
- 2023/24 delivery plans covered proactive engagement with all partners and the promotion of Staffordshire.
- SSLEP were in pathway two, which meant they would continue to operate but with no capital.
- Information on the City Deal Carbon Emissions reduction targets, how this was reported and local authority involvement in collecting the data, was requested. It was agreed that this would be investigated and reported to members.

The Chairman thanked the representatives of SSLEP for an informative and worthwhile debate. Whilst acknowledging that there had been a request for more frequent scrutiny of the LEP it was felt that given the Committees work programme it would be more useful to scrutinise the LEP in a different format in future, with additional information and case studies of projects on the Local Growth Fund or Building Fund; their purpose; LEP contribution to the bids; and the project results, would be more useful. This may also help the committee understand the bidding criteria and how projects were selected. The SSLEP stated that they would also be happy to attend District/Borough meetings if requested, which would provide an opportunity to scrutinise at a local level.

Resolved:

- a) That the report be received and noted.
- b) That at the next scrutiny meeting with the SSLEP (annual scrutiny) the report contains case studies of projects on the Local Growth Fund or Building Fund; their purpose; LEP contribution to the bids; and the project aims and results.
- c) Information on the City Deal Carbon Emissions reduction targets, how this was reported and local authority involvement in collecting the data, be provided to the committee.

52. Work Programme

Resolved: That the Work Programme be noted.

Chairman