

Minutes of the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 15 June 2022

Present: Tina Clements (Chairman)

Attendance

Philippa Haden	Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf
Syed Hussain	David Smith
Graham Hutton	Bernard Williams
Peter Kruskonjic (Vice-Chairman (Overview))	

Apologies: Philip Hudson, Ian Lawson and Ross Ward

PART ONE

6. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

7. Minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2022

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

8. Highways Transformation Programme - Update

The Committee considered an oral report and PowerPoint presentation (slides attached at Appendix 1 to the signed minutes) of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport updating them on progress made with regard to the Highways Transformation programme.

During his presentation the Cabinet Member highlighted:- (i) the three key elements of the Programme ie Future Highways Delivery Model, Transforming Our Offer Now and Highways Investment Strategy; (ii) Future Delivery Model; (iii) Hybrid Mixed Economy Model; (iv) Future Deliver Options; (v) Conclusions; (vi) Next Steps and; (vii) Questions for the Committee.

In the full and wide-ranging discussion which ensued Members gave detailed scrutiny to the progress made in the Programme to date, asking questions, seeking clarification and raising areas of concern as necessary, including:- (i) the ability of the chosen delivery model option to build

confidence and improve customer experience including systems for reporting defects by both elected Members and general public; (ii) the need for effective communication between any future Highways Strategic Partner(s), the Cabinet Member and Local elected representatives; (iii) the existing Highways Strategic Partner's performance against key performance metrics and examples of poor service in individual Members' Divisions and; (iv) comparisons in performance with neighbouring Highway Authority areas.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged that perceptions of the existing delivery arrangements had, in the past, been poor. However, in response to this, the Authority had amended the contract's terms to give greater priority to quality. He reassured Members that future arrangements would also prioritise quality in order to arrest the decline in the condition of the highway network which had occurred in recent years. He highlighted additional funding which had recently been identified by the Authority for eg Community Highways Teams and gulley emptying works both of which had been successful in building confidence. Also, the Highway Inspection Service had been brought back 'in-house', a measure which was expected to improve the general condition of the estate.

In conclusion, the Committee agreed that satisfactory progress had been made in the Highways Transformation Programme to date but urged the Cabinet Member to have regard to their comments, particularly in respect of the need to build confidence and improve quality, in his work to identify the most appropriate future delivery model for the service.

RESOLVED – (i) That the report be received and noted.
(ii) That satisfactory progress had been made in the Highways Transformation Programme to date.

(iii) That the Cabinet Member be urged to have regard to the above-mentioned comments in his work to identify the most appropriate future delivery model for the Highways maintenance service.

(iv) That progress in the Highways Transformation Programme Continue to be monitored closely and further update reports be brought the Committee, as necessary.

9. SEND Review: Right Support, Right Place, Right Time, Government Consultation on the SEND and Alternative Provision System in England

The Committee considered a report of the Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND) regarding Central Government's consultation White Paper entitled "SEND review: right support, right place, right time", which had been published on 29 March 2022 for comments by 22 July 2022

(schedule 2 to the signed minutes). The Cabinet Member had requested assistance from the Committee in formulating a response with a view to its submission by the above-mentioned deadline.

Members heard that the White Paper sought views on proposals aimed at delivering greater national consistency in support for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), how SEND should be assessed and how support should be funded. This followed a review into the existing arrangements introduced in 2014 which found that:- (i) Children and Young People with SEND or in Alternative (educational) Provision (AP) experienced consistently poorer outcomes in comparison to their peers; (ii) the experiences of Children with SEND or in AP and their families were generally negative; (iii) the SEND and AP systems were financially unsustainable and; (iv) there was national inconsistency across the SEND system in terms of assessment and provision to meet needs.

Specifically, the Department for Education were proposing to:- (i) establish a new national SEND and AP system which set nationally consistent standards for how needs were identified and met at every stage of a child's journey through education, health and social care; (ii) create new local SEND partnerships which brought together education, health, care and Local Government partners to produce a local inclusion plan to set out how each area would meet the new national standards; (iii) introduce a new national framework of banding and price tariffs for funding, matched to levels of need and types of education provision set out in national standards; (iv) support parents and carers to express an informed preference for a suitable placement by providing a tailored list of settings including mainstream, specialist and independent; (v) introduce a standardised and digitised Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) process and template to minimise bureaucracy and deliver consistency and; (vi) streamline the redress process to make it easier to resolve disputes earlier including through mandatory mediation, whilst retaining tribunals for the most challenging cases.

During the full and wide-ranging discussion which ensued, Members gave detailed scrutiny to the White Paper and proposed contents of Staffordshire's response, asking questions, seeking clarification and raising areas of concern as necessary, including:- (i) the lack of funding for SEND, the impact of rising demand for Education and Healthcare Needs Assessments on Local Authority response times and how this was to be addressed by Government; (ii) the need to improve communication between key stakeholders during all stages of a child's SEND and AP journey having regard to difficulties which had arisen in the past; (iii) measures to promote inclusivity amongst all Staffordshire schools so that no child was left behind and; (iv) how the various proposals would be implemented having regard to schools' existing priorities.

The Cabinet Member explained that many of the provisions set out in the White Paper were already being delivered in Staffordshire eg banding and digitisation. However, where this was not the case, there was a general lack of detail as to how new measures would be achieved given existing funding streams. Therefore, Lobbying Government for additional resources was critical and engagement undertaken to date suggested that the Department for Education were mindful of the system-wide pressures being faced by Partners including those of local authorities in particular.

In conclusion, the Committee agreed with the Cabinet Member that the various aspirations set out in the white Paper were to be welcomed but that there was a lack of detail on how some of these would be achieved. They noted that Staffordshire was an exemplar in certain respects with regard to the proposals but urged the Cabinet Member to continue lobbying Central Government for additional resources so that new measures could be implemented for the benefit of all children having regard to the importance of educational attainment to achieving the Authority' strategic priorities.

RESOLVED – (i) That the report be received and noted.

(ii) That the contents of the County Council's proposed response to the Government's White Paper entitled "SEND review: right support, right place, right time", as set out in the report, be supported.

(iv) That the various measures contained in the White Paper already being implemented by Staffordshire, making them an exemplar, be welcomed.

(iii) That the Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND) be urged to continue his efforts to lobby Central Government for additional resources so that the various other aspirations contained in the White Paper can be successfully delivered within a satisfactory time-scale.

10. Work Programme

RESOLVED – That, subject to the following amendments, the updated Work Programme (schedule 3 to the signed minutes) be approved:-

- Additional meeting arranged for **Wednesday 19 October 2022 at 2.00 pm, County Buildings, Stafford** to consider:- (i)

Countryside Review – Update; (ii) Staffordshire History Centre – Update and; (iii) Libraries and Arts – Update (all previously scheduled for September 2022 meeting).

- Chasewater Vision (not previously programmed) to be considered at October 2022 meeting, also.
- Consideration of Town Centre Regeneration (previously programmed for July 2022 meeting) to be deferred at the request of Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills, until further notice.

**11. Date of Next Meeting - Thursday 7 July 2022 at 10.00 am
County Buildings, Stafford**

RESOLVED – That the date, time and venue of the next meeting be noted.

Chairman