

Minutes of the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 17 October 2023

Present: Tina Clements (Chair)

Attendance	
Charlotte Atkins	Peter Kruskonjic (Vice-Chair (Overview))
Philippa Haden	Samantha Thompson
Graham Hutton	Bernard Williams

Also in attendance: Darryl Eyers, Jonathan Lindop and David Williams

Apologies: Philip Hudson, David Smith and Ross Ward

Part One

22. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

23. Minutes of meeting held on 28 September 2023

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

24. Avanti West Coast Mainline Rail Services

The Committee considered an oral report and PowerPoint presentation (slides attached at Appendix 1 to the signed minutes) of Avanti West Coast's (AWC) Regional Growth Manager regarding his Company's performance in operating rail services along the west Coast Mainline through Staffordshire.

The meeting was attended by Mark Osbourne, AWC's Regional Growth Manager.

County Councillor Jeremy Pert also attended the meeting and spoke, at the invitation of the Chairman, owing to his request for the Committee to scrutinise this matter in line with the provisions of the Constitution.

During his report and presentation the Regional Growth Manager explained: (i) How the Rail Industry Attributed Delays/Cancellations (amongst the various operators along the line); (ii) AWC's Recent Performance (since their current contract began in December 2019) and; (iii) AWC's Future Plans.

Members noted that AWC had entered into an Emergency Recovery Measures Agreement (ERMA) with the Government's Office of Rail and Road in March 2020 owing to poor performance. However, according to the statistics presented (for percentage of Trains cancelled and on-time), performance had improved since December 2022 and during the period 20 August to 16 September 2023 the Company had outperformed the Industry Average. Furthermore, they noted that AWC had moved from the ERMA onto a National Rail Contract on 15 October 2023 for a three-year term with the possibility of an extension for a further six years dependant on satisfactory performance.

During the full and wide-ranging discussion which ensued, Members scrutinised and held AWC to account over the performance of their services specifically in Staffordshire asking questions, seeking clarification and raising areas of concern as necessary including:- (i) the overall decline in passengers numbers since 2020 and AWC's efforts to increase rail usage through new initiatives eg Superfare; (ii) the likely impact of the Government's recent announcement regarding HS2 Phase 2; (iii) AWC performance compared Virgin Trains, the previous operator of the West Coast Mainline route; (iv) the frequency of services at Staffordshire's Railway Stations; (v) the price of rail tickets from Staffordshire to London and; (vi) the need to re-build trust and confidence amongst passengers and prospective rail users.

In conclusion, the Committee were encouraged by news of AWC's improved performance. However, they remained concerned over its sustainability and in comparison to previous years in terms of passenger numbers. They therefore requested AWC's Regional Growth Manager to provide them with a progress update in six-months' time and for representatives of Network Rail and HS2 to be invited to attend the meeting so that they could better understand the implications of recent Government announcements on rail services in the County in particular, the Hanchurch Interchange.

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

(b) That news of Avanti West Coast's improved performance along the West Coast Mainline in Staffordshire be welcomed.

(c) That Avanti West Coast provide a progress update on their performance in six-month's time having regard to the Committee's on-going concerns.

(d) That Network Rail and HS2 be invited to attend the above-mentioned meeting so that the Committee can better understand the implications of recent Government announcements on rail services in the County.

25. Work Programme

RESOLVED – That, subject to the re-scheduling of the 'North Staffordshire Air Quality Action Plan Ministerial Direction – Update' item (currently listed for their 2 February 2024 meeting) as necessary, following advice received from the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, the updated Work Programme (schedule 1 to the signed minutes) be approved.

26. Date of Next Meeting - Thursday 9 November 2023 at 10.00 am, County Buildings, Stafford

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

Chair