

Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 19 December 2013

Present: Brian Edwards (Chairman)

Ann Beech
Len Bloomer
Maureen Compton
Mark Deaville

Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf
Martyn Tittley (Vice-Chairman)
Ellen Wright

Also in attendance: Ben Adams and Mike Lawrence

Apologies: George Adamson, Geoff Martin, Geoff Morrison, Neil Taylor and Diane Todd

PART ONE

24. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

25. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 20 November 2013

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 20 November 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

26. Impact of the 16-19 Bursary Fund on the participation of 16-18 year olds in education and training

The 16-19 Bursary fund had replaced the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and Members now received details of the trends in participation since the introduction of the 16-19 Bursary fund.

In 2013/14 post-16 providers received 16-19 Bursary Fund allocations for discretionary bursaries only. Funding for vulnerable student bursaries were held centrally by the Education Funding Agency's (EFA) Learner Support Service. The Bursary fund sought to target young people who faced real financial barriers to participation, with a guaranteed award to the most vulnerable groups. In addition providers were able to make discretionary awards, based on their own published policy and criteria, for other learners who most needed financial support to enable them to participate. Providers were able to supplement this bursary fund if they wished to.

The Department for Education (DfE) had commissioned NatCen Social Research to evaluate the 16-19 Bursary Fund over three years. The first report had been published in May 2013 and found that income related criteria were used to issue bursaries, with these mainly being used for transport costs and educational equipment. The report found that providers felt the fund was targeted at greatest need and was flexible enough to meet individual needs. However the report also found that this flexibility could lead to

unequal levels of bursary support and that common policies across providers could mitigate this.

Raising the Participation Age (RPA) had started in April 2013 with duties placed on the Local Authority (LA) that required young people to stay-on in education or training to the age of 17 in 2013 and 18 by 2015. The RPA defined participation as full-time education, an apprenticeship or full time employment with part-time education or training.

The Cabinet Member, Learning and Skills, informed Members that although there was a mixed picture across Staffordshire in post-16 participation, in general it was positive, showing an upward trend. Members received details of 2009-2012 participation of Staffordshire 16-17 year olds and a breakdown of the EFA allocation of 16-19 Bursary Funds over the last three academic years. They noted that despite the number of young people in secondary education declining the trend in participation at post 16 was increasing, despite this lower volume of young people feeding into post 16 education.

Members were disappointed that there was no Staffordshire specific robust data available from the EFA. The EFA guidance gave no requirement for providers to share data with the Council. Although information was shared by some providers, this was done on a voluntary basis.

Members asked which vulnerable groups were supported through the centrally administered fund. These were vulnerable groups as defined by the EFA, being young people in care, care leavers and disabled young people in receipt of Disability Living Allowance and Employment Support Allowance. Those young people who were at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) were also supported through the Careers and Participation Service (CaPS) which was now part of Entrust.

The Select Committee asked how the bursary fund was publicised to ensure that those who would benefit were aware of this support. This was undertaken in a number of ways, including Youth Box (which also linked into other social media), through schools, colleges and other providers as well as through the CaPS.

Members asked if the Bursary was fully funded by Central Government and were informed that the centrally funded allocation was administered directly through the EFA, with funds drawn down on demand throughout the academic year for the provider based elements. Members also heard that providers supported young people in their applications for Bursary funding.

RESOLVED – That the Select Committee noted the positive trend in participation of young people since the introduction of the Bursary Fund.

27. Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Education Trust

The Education Trust operated as the strategic arm around learning and skills for the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The Trust brought together all organisations that had an interest in education, training, skills and jobs. Its purpose was to raise achievement, employability and aspirations amongst young people and adults in the area. Members received details of the Trust's terms of reference, governance structure, key task groups and business plan.

The Cabinet Member, Learning and Skills, informed Members that good progress had been made over the last eighteen months. Work was ongoing to improve links between business and education and training providers, with the importance of good, impartial careers advice and guidance and the exposure of young people to the work place as critical in helping them decide their future options.

Members heard of the success of the Skills Show in November and of three local events within Staffordshire that would mirror the National show. The events targeted over 3000 young people from 14-19 and those 19-25 with learning difficulties, those with disabilities and NEETs. The skills events would be complemented by a range of short local skills activities targeting over 600 young people, that would be delivered through colleges, schools and employer premises.

The Trust was working to support the City Deal negotiations with Central Government in respect of skills. Matching skills supply and demand was a priority for the Trust, seeking to secure better influence and alignment of skills provision and delivery across the area. The Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LEP was one of three to be selected for a skills pilot, giving the LEP greater influence over the Adult Skills Budget that funded colleges and training providers in delivering classroom and work based training.

The Cabinet Member informed the Select Committee that there were currently record low levels of unemployment in Staffordshire.

Members suggested that links with local employers had been fostered for a number of years, with GEC Alstom given as an example. This company currently recruited many of its engineers from abroad, particularly from Spain, as the skill set was not available locally. Members asked what skill gaps had been identified through the work of the Education Trust. The Engineering skills gap had already been identified, with 2600 engineers required each year within the County at present. This demand was expected to increase with developments within I54, Jaguar Landrover and JCB. Within other areas of the County skill set requirements had also been identified, around advanced materials and ceramics in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle, and the automotive industry in Tamworth.

The Cabinet Member informed the Select Committee that he felt the work of the Education Trust was something new. He felt that there had been a failure to address the skills gap over the last ten years. The Skills show had been an opportunity to inform young people as well as their teachers to where the skills gaps were and the need to ensure young people had a good set of core skills that ensure their future employability. A young person's option choice was vital to ensuring they had the right skill sets for the future. He also reminded Members that the number of apprenticeships had doubled.

Members asked what opportunities were available for adult education with regard to retraining for a different career pathway. Statistics showed that young people now in education were likely to be employed in jobs that didn't currently exist. Retraining would be critical with the rapid change in job structures and in supporting skill development to assist those unemployed getting back into employment.

Members were pleased to note that the Chairman of the Trust was Ken Stepney from JCB.

Members raised concerns at the time line for addressing the skill shortages, with the skills gap for engineering jobs needing urgent action, and asked how long a process it would be to train Staffordshire young people in these areas. The sense of urgency to address this was extreme, with the skills pilot helping to deliver ambitions in ensuring the right courses and qualifications were available for our young people. There was also an ambition to deliver engineering hubs where schools and colleges share engineering facilities for training and include the involvement of local businesses. It was anticipated that within the next 12 to 18 months young people would begin to have the skill sets identified to meet the demands of some of the large manufacturing industries within the area.

It was recognised that there was a need for a culture shift to develop skills from primary school aged pupils. There was also a recognition that to show employability young people needed to show ambition, present themselves well and have aspirations as well as qualifications.

RESOLVED – That the remit and progress in the establishment and development of the Education Trust and its key activities be supported.

28. Infrastructure +

The Select Committee received an oral report from Ian Turner, Head of Place Delivery Ventures, updating them on progress with the Infrastructure+ contract. At their meeting of 3 June 2013 Members had received a report outlining the procurement process. Infrastructure+ was driven partly by the requirement to replace the highways maintenance contract that expired in 2014, and partly by a desire to re-align work.

The work being considered within this contract incorporated the County's physical infrastructure, Country Parks, Rights of Way maintenance and the professional services aligned with these as well as highway scheme design, including major developments such as i54 and the growth of the A50 corridor and other pinch points, highways laboratory, highways administration including land charges and highways permits. The Highways asset was the County's biggest asset, valued at £6 billion.

Consideration had been given to what success would look like, with critical success factors including: increased value; customer focused; financial sustainability and flexibility.

The value of the contract had required the EU procurement process to be followed, with the contract advertised in the EU Journal. The opportunity had been taken to involve the District and Borough Councils and Stoke-on-Trent City Council in the development process.

A pre-qualification process was undertaken, with five bidders chosen from this process. A competitive dialogue process then took place with three bidders chosen following the presentation of outline submissions. The deadline for the three preferred bidders detailed procurement submissions had been Friday 13 December. When evaluating the

submissions investment in quality technology and the opportunities for growth would be main considerations (60 per cent weighting with a 40 per cent weighting on price). Opportunities were available for business development resulting from this contract and the Council would want to understand what sort of revenue generation was possible within the offer. A number of staff had agreed to give time and expertise over the Christmas holiday period to help evaluate submissions.

Some skills gaps had been identified in the local population around civil engineering and work was being developed with local colleges and universities to develop courses to address this shortage. Development opportunities also existed within the Highways Laboratory and the possible expansion of the private work this unit currently undertakes.

A delegated decision would be taken at the beginning of January by the Cabinet Member, Economy and Infrastructure, on the preferred bidder, with this decision being considered by the Select Committee at a special meeting scheduled for 12 February 2014 prior to consideration at Cabinet on 19 February.

Previously the Select Committee had raised governance and project management of the contract as an issue. Once the contract was awarded there would be a combination of backward looking performance appraisal as well as more forward looking process that identified what further benefits would be developed for the Council when offering ongoing work. The performance framework, including measures and reporting mechanism would be brought to the special meeting on 12 February.

RESOLVED – That the oral report be noted.

29. Achieving Excellence: Libraries in a Connected Staffordshire

The Select Committee considered proposals to adapt and reposition Staffordshire's library offer to make a more effective contribution to the lives of local residents. Traditionally the library services had been buildings based, with 43 library buildings across Staffordshire, 6 mobile libraries, 2 travelling libraries, 7 prison based libraries and a schools library service. A virtual library had also been developed which enhanced the traditional offer.

The way in which people accessed information and reading had changed and there was a need for libraries to evolve to meet these changes. It was anticipated that in the future greater emphasis would be placed on virtual resources with less need for physical resources. More co-location and co-production of services would require libraries to be more closely attuned to the needs and aspirations of the community, with their involvement in the management, development and delivery of services.

A consultation process would be undertaken to help in developing future services. The consultation would look at a combination of an online offer, a physical offer at a locality and town level and a physical offer at a community and village level. The consultation would be carried out over a 12 week period with support from the Customer Insight Team.

The Select Committee agreed that there was a need to ensure value from the library service. The proposal to move Stafford Library and the Shire Hall Gallery was raised

with concerns shared at this proposal. These were key facilities for Stafford residents, placed at the heart of the community. It was felt to be an excellent facility and representations had been received by local Stafford Councillors raising anxiety at this proposal. Residents had also expressed their unease at Staffordshire Place (SP) being the proposed new library venue, disliking the glass exterior and feeling that this would move the facility out of the heart of the community.

The Cabinet Member, Children, Communities and Localism, informed Members that the current Stafford Library building was not ideal, with access difficult for many as it was on a number of levels, and with a poor main entrance. The SP building would give a more modern library, with better access. With new developments in that area of the Town he felt that the library would be located in the new heart of the Town's commercial section. When referring to a recent interview on Radio Stoke the Cabinet Member confirmed that the Shire Hall was a listed building and although the library would no longer be in this facility, the building itself would remain and he was comfortable for alternative uses to be found for this facility. Re-locating the library to SP would also allow a more cost effective and efficient use of staff. He stated that his intention was to protect the library service for the future but that some libraries would be provided in alternative venues and some were likely to disappear.

Members asked for clarification on the difference between travelling and mobile libraries. The difference was essentially one of size, with travelling libraries being larger vehicles that usually visit communities for half a day while mobile libraries were smaller vehicles that could visit more rural and isolated communities.

The proposal to make use of community hubs for future library services was applauded, with Members recommending that consideration be given to the Fire Service hubs when looking for co-location opportunities. Members also felt that closer working with Parish Council's would help develop community working.

Members raised the issue of training for library staff and whether they were comfortable with the developments in respect of the virtual library service offer. Earlier in the year a national skills audit had been completed providing detail of the confidence and competence of staff in providing information and advice on access online information. An online national training package was being developed to help support and develop skill sets which would be used to support staff development where gaps had been identified.

The timescale for decisions on the movement of Stafford library were requested, seeking clarification on when this decision would be considered by Cabinet. Members were informed that this would not go to Cabinet but would be an item to the Strategic Property Board in January for their consideration. Should the decision be taken to move Stafford Library it was expected to take between 6 – 9 months.

The Cabinet Member confirmed that the Shire Hall Gallery would not be closed until the future of the building had been determined.

RESOLVED - That the proposals to adapt and reposition the Staffordshire library offer be noted.

30. Work Programme

The Select Committee received an update from the Scrutiny and Support Manager on their work programme. She noted the following changes:

- the Business and Consumer Protection item that had been due to come to this meeting had not been included on the agenda as this was no longer part of the Infrastructure+ project, with the intention that it be considered as a stand alone project. However a decision was made that this would not form part of the corporate projects supported by the TSU, with work on improvements and efficiencies under business as usual arrangements;
- two extra meetings have been scheduled in February to consider the Infrastructure+ proposals and in April to help manage outstanding work programme items;
- the Tourism Strategy would be considered in March as it was expected that national data would be available for that item;
- the Working group considering the Ofsted inspection of LA school improvement arrangements was expected to report to the January Select Committee;
- the Rev Preb Michael Metcalf reminded Members that the SACRE Annual report was now published and it was proposed to bring this to the January Select Committee for information.

RESOLVED – That the update on the Work Programme be noted.

Chairman

Documents referred to in these minutes as Schedules are not appended, but will be attached to the signed copy of the Minutes of the meeting. Copies, or specific information contained in them, may be available on request.