

**Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 7
March 2014**

Present: Brian Edwards (Chairman)

George Adamson
Ann Beech
Len Bloomer
Maureen Compton
Mark Deaville

Geoff Martin
Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf
Martyn Tittley (Vice-Chairman)
Diane Todd

Also in attendance: Mike Lawrence and Simon Tagg

Apologies: Ben Adams, Geoff Morrison, Neil Taylor, Mark Winnington and Ellen Wright

PART ONE

43. Declarations of Interest

There were none on this occasion.

**44. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 12
February 2014**

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee meeting held on 12 February 2014 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

**45. Petition - Proposed removal of the Library, Gallery and other facilities from
the Shire Hall and sale of the building**

The Select Committee considered the report of the Scrutiny and Support Manager on the petition over the proposed removal of the library, gallery and other facilities from the Shire Hall and the sale of the building. The petition had 2,915 signatures, made up of 1960 hand written signatures and 955 signatures from the e-petition. The Select Committee heard that under the Council's Petition Scheme named senior officers were required to attend Scrutiny Committee meetings to give evidence about the issues raised by petitions with over 2,500 signatures.

The Chairman gave Mrs M Compton, lead petitioner and Local Member, the opportunity to address the Select Committee with her concerns.

Mrs Compton reminded the Select Committee that the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) considered by Cabinet in December referred to a proposal for the relocation of the Shire Hall Library into Staffordshire Place (SP) and subsequently vacating the Shire Hall building. Mrs Compton informed Members of the rationale behind the use of the Shire Hall as the central Stafford library, creating a cultural quarter (the Library, Theatre, Gallery and William Salt Library) in the centre of Stafford. She reminded Members that the Shire Hall was an asset with the library based on three floors, with a large music collection and a number of small rooms that were well used for

study and research, particularly by students. A large number of activities were held in the library, including most recently activities around World Book Day. The building also provided a sensory room which was well used by local families and a café. The old Court rooms were an asset of local historic interest which were also regularly used by theatre groups.

The Shire Hall was a much loved and well used grade 2 listed building. Following the draft MTFS report to Cabinet in December the proposal had been picked up by local newspapers and radio. Mrs Compton shared concerns over reported comments from Cabinet Members that they were comfortable with the Shire Hall being sold for retail, licensed premises or a hotel.

Mrs Compton also shared the views of some of those who had contacted her with their concerns, including that:

- the building was nationally recognised for its architecture and had been well restored. This work would be wasted should the building be sold;
- the County Council should be enhancing facilities in the Town Centre;
- it would be detrimental to the people of Stafford;
- the SP building was soulless and would have a detrimental effect on the library service;
- the proposal to move the library was due to the Council being unable to fill the space with retail as they had originally planned.

At the 13 February Council meeting and in response to a question from Mrs Compton, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Transformation had confirmed that no decision had been taken to sell the Shire Hall. Mrs Compton asked for confirmation that this meant the Shire Hall would not be sold and therefore the cultural quarter in Stafford would not be split up.

The Select Committee then heard from the Director for Place and Deputy Chief Executive. She informed the Select Committee that there were no current plans to move the Shire Hall Gallery or to sell the building. However whilst no decision had yet been taken over the location of the library, consideration was being given to the suitability of that building as a library space.

The Director informed Members that when the library had originally relocated to the Shire Hall, complaints had been made over the unsuitability of the building for a library.

The layout of the Shire Hall made access and management of the building difficult. In November 2012, as part of the Adult Users libraries survey, the Stafford library was ranked 26 out of 28 for internal attractiveness and given an overall facility rating of 27 out of 28 by users, demonstrating that actual library users are less than satisfied with the facility. Comments made by users as part of this survey highlighted the poor facilities and unsuitability of the building.

The move of Warwick library into Warwickshire County Council's headquarters was highlighted as an example of where a council had successfully moved their library into the council offices and it was suggested that Members may find a visit to this facility interesting and insightful.

The Director noted that there were 23,947 members of Stafford library and that the petition had gathered just under 3000 signatures, which was around 12% of library user numbers.

It was re-iterated that there were no current plans to relocate the Gallery; however the Local Authority continued to consider how it made use of and safeguarded the future of public buildings.

The petition referred to the established cultural quarter within Stafford town centre, but the Director pointed out that historically, there had been previous consideration of moving the gallery. In 2006 the then Corporate Review Scrutiny Committee had considered a call in of a cabinet decision to undertake a feasibility study for a new Arts Space in Stafford. At that time the relevant Cabinet Support Member for Culture and Heritage had supported the relocation of the Gallery into the proposed new Arts Space. This would have resulted in the break up of the cultural quarter.

Finally the Director reiterated that there were no current plans to sell the building.

Concern was expressed by some Members that the Cabinet Member, Communities and Localism, should have responded to the points raised by Mrs Compton rather than the Director, as this was a political debate. However Members were reminded that under the County Council's Petition Scheme the named senior officer was required to attend Scrutiny Committee meetings to give evidence about the issues raised by petitions with over 2,500 signatures. Some Members remained unhappy with this approach and felt this should be raised with the Council's Chief Executive.

Members emphasised the importance of the Shire Hall to Stafford's heritage and felt if there were access issues the appropriate improvements should be made. Chatsworth was given as an example of where a listed building could successfully address access issues.

Concerns were raised that the views expressed during consultation would not be taken into account when decisions were made. Once the Shire Hall was sold it would be an asset lost forever.

Mrs Compton informed Members that she had visited SP1 yesterday, the intended area for the re-location of the library, in anticipation of today's debate. During this visit she was made aware of a problem with the damp course which would currently make the premises unsuitable for storing books and records. During her visit Mrs Compton said that rain was coming inside the building which again made this an unsuitable library premises. She felt that it had been a pity that the 2006 Arts Space project had not been implemented as this would have added value to the town.

The Chairman reminded Members that there was no official consultation report as yet and that the Select Committee would be involved in scrutinising any proposals prior to a Cabinet decision. It was anticipated that a report on this issue would be included on the June Select Committee agenda, which the Chairman felt was the most appropriate time to debate these issues.

Mrs Compton asked for clarification on whether there would be consultation on any proposal to sell the Shire Hall. Janene Cox, Commissioner for Tourism and the Cultural County, reiterated that there were no plans to relocate the Shire Hall Gallery and therefore no consultation was being undertaken on this issue. She reminded Members of the background, process and key dates for the proposal to move the library.

Mrs Compton remained concerned over the future of the Shire Hall Gallery and formally proposed that the Shire Hall Gallery should not be sold. Mr George Adamson seconded this proposal, and following a show of hands the proposal was defeated, with 5 votes against the proposal to 4 votes in favour.

RESOLVED – That the Select Committee consider this issue at their 2 June meeting, prior to any Cabinet decision, and where detailed proposals will be available.

[Note by Clerk: the June meeting has been re-scheduled to accommodate the necessary timescales for the consultation process.]

46. A50 Growth Corridor

[Mr Philip Atkins, Council Leader, in attendance for this item as local member.]

Proposals to improve the A50 in Uttoxeter had been announced by the Government as part of the National Infrastructure Plan and in the Autumn Statement in December 2013. The improvements were in response to existing congestion on the A50 and emerging proposals for residential and business growth in and around the town.

The A50 is a trunk road managed by the Highways Agency (HA), with management of the A50 sub-contracted to Connect Roads, a subsidiary of Balfour Beatty. The HA had agreed that the County Council would be their delivery partner, responsible for delivering the developments through two distinct infrastructure projects.

Project A, Western Grade Separated Junction, included construction of a new grade separated junction to the west of Uttoxeter. This would be the first project developed and would provide access to the proposed housing and employment site to the north of the A50. This project would require its own planning application and compulsory purchase order, and be delivered under a separate construction contract.

Project B, Eastern Grade Separated Junction, was to configure the existing Dove Way bridge over the A50 by converting it to a grade separated junction. This would involve constructing new roundabouts at each end of the existing bridge and slip roads down to the A50 carriageway. The development would also include closing the two “at grade” roundabouts in Uttoxeter, in the centre of Uttoxeter adjacent to McDonalds and the roundabout to the east of Uttoxeter adjacent to the Premier Inn Hotel.

Mr Philip Atkins, Leader of the Council, addressed the Select Committee in his capacity as one of the Local Members for this area. He congratulated the Officers for the work they had undertaken, including the consultation events, and for the speed at which the scheme had advanced. Some businesses would be affected but this should be addressed in the valuation process. The scheme would be a great benefit, in particular

for businesses such as Alton Towers, Toyota and Rolls Royce, improving the East West access route.

Select Committee Members welcomed this development and the jobs creation that was expected as a result. Some concern was expressed at the closure of the JCB factory in Rugeley and the movement of this work to the East Staffordshire factory, with a hope that there would be the opportunity for job relocation rather than job losses for the Rugeley based work force.

RESOLVED – That the proposals to improve the A50 in Uttoxeter be supported.

47. Highways and the Built County Capital Programme

The Select Committee received a presentation by James Bailey, Commissioner for Highways and the Built County, on highways and the Built County Capital Programme, giving consideration to how this was evaluated to ensure best value.

The Programme looked at investment in connection with the provision of new or existing infrastructure. Members received details of capital grant funding for both maintenance and integrated transport. The two components were not ring fenced and were therefore locally determined subject to Cabinet approval. Following a similar presentation to the then Assets and Budget Scrutiny Committee in November 2010, authority to sign off the Annual Programme had been delegated to the appropriate Cabinet Member, currently the Cabinet Member, Economy and Infrastructure.

There was a 5% top slice from the maintenance element to support other County Council programmes. However the grant level had stayed relatively stable over the last five years. The County Council had invested a further £50m for maintenance over this period, however this extra investment had now concluded and therefore next year funding would revert back to historic levels from Central Government grant alone.

Staffordshire was at the forefront of Asset Management Plan development with regard to highway maintenance. Preventative maintenance offered the most effective use of resources over the assets lifecycle, with the Council's maintenance strategy set out in its Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP). Members heard that the optimum capital investment for Staffordshire was circa £30m per annum, which was significantly above the grant funding received and Members received details of the proposed allocation for capital maintenance in 2014/15.

The Staffordshire Local Transport Plan gave a framework for local infrastructure and prioritised individual projects that addressed specific needs. The Plan considered economic prosperity, road safety, connectivity, health and quality of life and localism. Within the Plan four existing projects received £3.6m of the £6.2m funding allocation.

Members received details of Leverage funding allocation, including a breakdown of allocation and the benefit generated. This included in respect of:

- The Government Pinch Point Programme
- Emerging Local Enterprise Partnership priorities re economic development and regeneration, eg i54 South Staffs and A34 Redhill Business Park

- Local Sustainable Transport Fund North Staffs and Stafford Sustainable Transport packages;
- Pedal Peak: Caldon canal towpath improvement; and
- Developer led schemes secured via s.278/s.106 planning conditions, eg Tesco Rugeley and MoD Beaconside, Stafford.

The Select Committee received details of the Divisional Highway Programme (DHP) and how this addressed locally identified priorities.

Staffordshire was in the lowest quartile of local Council's for revenue expenditure whilst achieving above average customer satisfaction. Staffordshire also had the safest County Council road network in the Country for the third year running based on the Department of Transport calculation of the number of accidents relative to use and extent of the network.

Members asked how the Infrastructure+ contract would add value and were informed that value would be added via:

- offering an end-to-end service to mitigate the impact and support inward investment from private developers into Staffordshire;
- helping to reduce operating costs that would enable more work to be delivered for the same money; and
- generating revenues that help to reduce dependency on government grants.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be received.

48. Quality of Road Maintenance

The Select Committee received a presentation from Ian Turner, Head of Place Delivery Ventures, on the quality of road maintenance. Members were informed that quality was measured through:

- customer insight surveys and reputation tracker, with quality of the road network being a key issue for residents, it being a very visible service;
- road condition indicators, using visual surveys accredited to national standards;
- the National Highways and Transportation survey conducted by MORI;
- defect number, with all defects on the highway recorded; and
- customer contact.

Members received details of the works budgets, with pot holes being 11% of the works budget, general repairs accounting for 8% whilst street lighting was 40%. Members heard that the street lighting allocation was due mainly to the necessity to update dangerous lighting stock which was currently being undertaken through a Private Finance Initiative (PFI).

Members considered the CIPFA service comparison chart which highlighted that Staffordshire had the second lowest expenditure (based on the length of highway and its use) whilst being the fourth County Council in the country for performance.

A breakdown of highways defects in 2013 was received, and the comparison with previous years. On the whole the number of potholes identified related to the severity of

weather conditions, ie how cold and wet conditions had been that year. Members also received a breakdown of the top ten areas for customer contact in 2013, with potholes accounting for 32% of this.

“A Well Maintained Highway” was the code of practice that each Highways Authority worked towards, identifying good practice. Defects were categorised around urgency of the required repair and categorisation was usually established following an inspection of the reported fault. Where a member of the public had reported a fault an inspection would be made to assess the defect and potential risk to the public.

There were a number of repair techniques including:

- temporary, where a quick repair was undertaken to make a defect safe;
- semi-permanent, such as pothole repairs;
- roadmaster, which gave a more sympathetic and substantial repair;
- gang make-up, with consideration to the type of repair and equipment required and the best way to ensure high productivity where costly repairs were addressed;
- materials, ensuring the right materials were used for specific repairs. It was also important to keep abreast of the latest techniques and materials available.

The Select Committee saw examples of a range of equipment and style of work relative to the required repair and were shown images of typical road condition photographs and how these would be dealt with.

The different treatments available for repairs had different lifecycles and Members received details of these and their costs.

Members remained concerned that in some circumstances a category one pothole was repaired, with the team moving on without repairing other potholes in the vicinity because they were not as severe a categorisation. Whilst recognising the frustration this may cause it was important to ensure the most severe defects were dealt with first rather than repairing all in a street, additionally different equipment and gang sizes were used for different sizes and types of repair and there needed to be a balance between effective and productive use of the more costly teams and their equipment and the benefits of doing all work in one location. If they stayed to repair the surrounding more minor defects this would stop them from repairing other category one defects elsewhere, exposing the County Council to criticism.

Members asked how much the Council paid out in compensation claims as a consequence of potholes. This was less than £100,000 per annum, which was not enough to pay for another category one team. The majority of claims were made as a result of trips and falls on footways, with claims tending to be higher for this type of claim, being personal injury claims rather than vehicle repairs.

Members asked whether periodic inspections of the County’s road network were undertaken, and how often. Main roads were inspected monthly, with minor roads inspected quarterly and rural and estate roads annually.

Members felt that the issue of blocked gullies was as key as potholes and asked if there was a programme of gully works that members could access to help them address the

queries and complaints they receive from the public. The schedule for gullies was an issue. An area approach to this works had been undertaken, however since April 2013 a similar approach to that of road maintenance had been implemented. It was hoped to develop this work further to include live tracking on gullies works. This issue was tied up with the new Infrastructure+ contract. The issue included damage to gullies, sometimes as a result of root damage. There was a lack of knowledge of the drainage asset within the County. On some occasions utility works had been found to have cut through drainage connections. There was a balance needed between reactive and preventative works, however with limited resources this was difficult.

The range and size of farm machinery was suggested to have an adverse effect on the road condition and Members asked if there was a possibility of redress on farmers to help towards the cost of road repairs. Farmers could be prosecuted for muddy roads, however there was a need for absolute proof, which was difficult to establish. Generally the difficulties were not created by tractors but by delivery vehicles such as milk tankers.

Members raised concerns over Heavy Commercial Vehicles (HCVs) using country lanes and the damage this caused, and asked whether the County should be more pro-active in controlling this, ensuring they kept to A roads. It was not possible to stop vehicles from using roads, particularly if they were accessing premises. Weight restrictions could be used but there was a resource implication to this. It was suggested that Sat-nav businesses should have a part to play in this, ensuring better systems so that vehicles were not directed onto inappropriate roads. The Cabinet Support Member, Transport and the Connected County, informed Members that the Cabinet Member, Economy and Infrastructure, was working on a manifesto pledge with regard to HCVs.

The Select Committee thanked Ian Turner for his thorough and enthusiastic presentation.

RESOLVED - That the presentation be received.

49. Work Programme

The Scrutiny and Support Manager informed Members of the following proposed amendments to their Work Programme:

- A briefing note on the minerals local plan would be sent to Members shortly with an expectation that the plan would come to Committee on 24 April;
- The further report on achieving excellence: libraries in a connected Staffordshire, was expected to come to the Select Committee on 2 June, alternatively an extra meeting late in May would need to be arranged;
- Mr Tittley would be meeting with officers to discuss the issue of the Freight Policy and a decision would then be taken as to whether this should be a substantive item to the select Committee; and
- Following requests by Members items had been added to the work programme on: Entrust; Flood risk management; Shugborough; and Concessionary travel.

RESOLVED – That the amendments to the Work Programme be agreed.

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.