

**Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 25
July 2014**

Present: Brian Edwards (Chairman)

George Adamson
Ann Beech
Maureen Compton
Tim Corbett
Geoff Martin

Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf
Martyn Tittley (Vice-Chairman)
Paul Woodhead
Candice Yeomans

Also in attendance: Ben Adams, Mark Deaville and Mark Winnington

Apologies: Len Bloomer, Geoff Morrison and Diane Todd

PART ONE

1. Declarations of Interest

There were none on this occasion.

2. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 12 May 2014

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

3. Petition re Bradwell Lane

Under the Council's Petition Scheme a named Senior Officer is required to attend Select Committee meetings to give evidence about the issues raised by petitions with over 2,500 signatures. A petition with 2,707 signatures had been received requesting traffic calming measures at Bradwell Lane, Newcastle. A further 1,096 signatures had subsequently been added to this petition totalling 3,803 signatures (a further 1079 signatures had been collected through an online petition but this had not included addresses of signatories and therefore could not be included in the petition numbers).

The Lead Petitioner, Mrs Emma Meadon, addressed the Select Committee on the content of and background to the petition. Mrs Meadon had been a resident within this community for thirty years. There was a strong community feel amongst the 4000 residents. Bradwell Lane was used by non residents as a link between the A500 and the A50. The volume of traffic had increased over the last ten years and Mrs Meadon noted that road traffic had decreased nationally.

Mrs Meadon informed the Select Committee that the Lane was used as a "cut through" route for the hospital and was used to access the funeral parlour and crematorium. Satellite navigation systems diverted drivers through this route. Increased use by heavy goods vehicles and articulated lorries exacerbated the traffic problems. Mrs Meadon informed the Select Committee that as part of their conditions the FedEx business in this

area had signed an agreement not to use the Lane. However new businesses such as TK Maxx and George at Asda had developed since and Mrs Meadon told Members that these businesses had not be required to sign any such agreement to avoid using Bradwell Lane.

Bradwell Lane had a 30 mile per hour (mph) speed limit, however it was a straight piece of road and therefore easy for motorists to exceed this limit. The very high volume of traffic using the Lane made it extremely difficult for residents turning onto or off Bradwell Lane. In total there were seven turnings and/or junctions on this stretch of road.

Mrs Meadon informed Members that four weeks after the fatal accident, a speed check was undertaken by warranted officers of Staffordshire Police. The check took place between 6.00 and 9.30 pm. Nine people were prosecuted for speeding as a result of this exercise. A second speed check was undertaken later in the year, again by warranted police officers. On this occasion 95 motorists were caught speeding between the hours of 5.30 – 9.00 pm during a Saturday evening. Of those found speeding, two were prosecuted as they were driving at speeds over 45 mph in a 30mph area. Twenty seven were sent advisory letters as they were driving between 36-45 mph.

Mrs Meadon said she understood that there would be cost implications to any speed reduction measures, and that funding was restricted. However Mrs Meadon gave an example of road maintenance where she felt funding had been wasted in that Bradwell Lane had been resurfaced only 4 ½ weeks after the road markings had been re-painted, therefore requiring them to be re-painted again. She also highlighted that inspite of the road chippings from the resurfacing, and the 20mph signs displayed during this time, she felt that there had been no discernable reduction in speed along that road, in fact the 95 speeding motorists had been caught during the second speed check at this time.

Mrs Meadon said she had just received information that an automated speed check had been undertaken on 7 July but that she had not been able to access the results of this exercise as yet.

Whilst the fatal accident happened on Bradwell Lane at the junction between Arnold Grove and Clare Avenue, Mrs Meadon was clear that the entire stretch of Bradwell Lane was dangerous because of the volume and speed of the traffic. There had been two deaths in less than two years. Mrs Meadon also explained that she felt the data used by highway authorities was flawed as the number of highways reported accidents differed greatly from the number of road traffic accident injuries recorded by hospitals.

Mrs Meadon concluded that whilst she understood that the Council's "hands were tied" at present because the Coroner's report had not been completed, this issue would not go away, such was the strength of feeling amongst the community around Bradwell lane.

Mrs Ann Beech said she supported this petition. Mrs Beech represented Audley and Chesterton, which neighboured Bradwell. She informed the Select Committee that she had used this route on many occasions and agreed with Mrs Meadon over the difficulties in using this stretch of road.

Mrs Sandra Hambleton, Local Member for Bradwell, Porthill and Wolstanton, had submitted her support for the petition in writing to the Select Committee. Members received a copy of this submission which gave a detailed account of the difficulties faced along Bradwell Lane and its junctions. Mrs Hambleton concluded in highlighting that there had been three fatalities along that stretch of road, numerous incidents and that the installation of traffic lights had been proved to slow traffic during maintenance work and therefore would make the area safer.

Mr Richard Harris, Community Infrastructure Manager, responded to the submissions given on behalf of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Place. Mr Harris explained that the May fatal accident was still under investigation and confirmed that they were awaiting the Coroner's report. Whilst understanding the point made by Mrs Meadon in respect of the different type and number of road traffic accidents recorded by the Health Service as opposed to the Highways Authority, he explained that all highways authorities followed the same national guidelines for recording road traffic incidents. According to these guidelines there had been 19 accidents over the last three years throughout the entire length of Bradwell Lane. Of these nineteen, there had been one fatality and two serious accidents.

Mr Harris explained that this junction in isolation would not normally generate the traffic calming measures proposed. The accident data for the junction in isolation indicated five slight accidents in the last three years (excluding the recent fatality). A robust system was used to prioritise areas requiring traffic calming measures, and engineering solutions were usually the last considered. Mrs Hambleton, in discussion with David Greatbatch, Community Infrastructure Liaison Manager, had prioritised a speed research exercise and the Authority were awaiting the data from this. Depending on what the data showed it may then trigger consideration of mobile speed enforcement cameras and/or extra 30mph signage.

Mr Mark Winnington, Cabinet Member, Economy and Infrastructure, thanked Mrs Meadon for bringing this issue to his attention. He assured her that the Council would take the issue very seriously, however there was a need to await the results of the inquest before any action was taken. There were similar issues to that at Bradwell Lane across the County and it was important to prioritise. The Lane was used as a primary route now and Mr Winnington said that it was not possible to stop people using the road, nor would he want to stop the economy of Newcastle.

Mr Winnington felt that Bradwell Lane would be more likely to have speeding vehicles on it during evening hours as the volume of traffic would make this more difficult during the working day. Mr Winnington was aware that the local Member, Mrs Hambleton, was able to use her district highways fund to prioritise Bradwell Lane. He also raised concerns at police taking a back seat on speed enforcement. Mr Winnington said that Staffordshire had one of the lowest accident rates in the Country.

Mr Mark Deaville, Cabinet Support Member, Transport and the Connected County, also thanked Mrs Meadon for her very eloquent and detailed submission to the Select Committee. He offered his deepest condolences to the family of the victim for their recent loss following the May fatality on Bradwell Lane. However, sadly there was a need to deal with the statistics, as any county had to, when deciding where and what type of measures were taken to ensure safety across the County. He reminded

Members that Staffordshire was in the top five counties for road safety but recognised that this would mean little to those friends and family of the deceased. Mr Deaville also thanked Mrs Meadon for understanding the current difficulties faced by the Authority until the Coroner's report had been received. Once this information was available consideration would be given on what action should be taken.

Members of the Select Committee thanked Mrs Meadon for her calm and informative manner in addressing them. They noted the high level of concern highlighted by the petition numbers and whilst understanding the necessity of awaiting the Coroners report they felt there was a need for some urgency in addressing the concerns. It was suggested that as an interim measure the Select Committee write to the Safety Partnership requesting the use of mobile speed cameras in this area.

The possibility of installing traffic lights had previously been suggested in 2010, however this suggestion had not been included in the highways programme of works as this junction did not support the installation of lights as a solution within the finite funds available.

Members felt it was difficult to find a solution when they were not in receipt of all the facts and therefore this needed to be revisited after the Coroners report had been received. However from the photographs and details given they felt it appeared to be a poorly marked junction which could benefit from further road markings and warning signs.

The Chairman proposed that any recommendation from this Select Committee to Cabinet should be deferred until after they had received details of the Coroners report. He proposed writing to the Police Authority and the Road Safety Partnership highlighting the concerns raised by the petition and the Select Committee. Once the Coroners report had been received the Select Committee would consider this issue again, alongside any proposed action by the County Council. Mrs Meadon and Mrs Hambleton should be invited to attend the meeting.

RESOLVED – That: a) the Select Committee write to the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Safer Roads Partnership highlighting the concerns outlined by the petition and requesting use of mobile speed cameras in the area; and
b) the Select Committee consider this issue again once the Coroner's report has been received, with Mrs Hambleton and Mrs Meadon being invited to attend the meeting.

4. Executive Response to the Working Group Report on the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority School Improvement Arrangements

The Select Committee established a working group in 2013 which undertook a review into the Ofsted inspection of local authority school improvement arrangements. At their meeting of 24 January 2014 their findings and recommendations were endorsed and the recommendations were agreed by the Cabinet Member, Learning and Skills. The Select Committee now received the Executive Response Action Plan which set out the proposed action being taken in respect of each recommendation, the lead officer and deadlines by which the action would be taken.

The Cabinet Member, Learning and Skills, informed the Select Committee that because of the pace and effort put into this project further progress had been made to that noted within the action plan. Eighteen primary schools had been part of a recent focused inspection and further action was underway to take account of comments made by Ofsted. Work was ongoing to help communicate effectively with all stakeholders. He highlighted the recent School Conference and the new Governors Forum as examples of good communication methods and opportunities for sharing best practice and improved communication.

The Cabinet Member suggested that in respect of recommendation 3 the Select Committee may wish to receive six monthly updates on the work of the Ofsted Programme Board to help reassure themselves that work was on track.

The Commissioner for Education and Wellbeing updated Members on further action taken with regard to the recommendations.

Recommendation one, the data dashboard, continued to be developed and shared with schools. A letter was to be sent to all schools in September sharing the risk categorisation. The LA had invested in a data package, Perspectives Light, which every school would be able to access and would allow data recording capabilities to be uploaded. The package would allow transparency and be a further tool for schools to use in helping to drive improvements. The package would allow schools to log and access information through a single point and would be launched in September.

Alongside this the Staffordshire Learning Net had been restructured in respect of school improvement and was now more logical, accessible and clear.

Members asked whether the new data package would replace packages already used in schools. The new programme was a data platform that would allow schools to access information on a live basis and compare data across the County as well as nationally. This would allow early sight of data comparisons and help identify trends. The package was an enhancement rather than a replacement.

Recommendation two, sharing the new school improvement approach, Members were informed that the cascade of information was sometimes challenging. However work was ongoing to address these challenges, with district meetings for Chair of Governors and Headteachers in the Spring term involving over 200 schools and a summer conference with over 400 delegates sharing good practice and innovation. An e-newsletter was sent into schools every three to four weeks keeping schools well informed. The e school bag had been restructured to help easily identify key information and items for action as opposed to general information. The Members Bulletin was also being used to alert councillors to key issues. Members updates in East and South Staffordshire had already taken place and Cannock and Staffordshire Moorlands updates were due in the near future, although these were not always well attended.

Recommendation three, the on-line structure chart, Members were informed that some of the vacancies had now been filled and the information would be kept up to date.

Recommendation four, the Entrust joint venture, lessons learned had been carried forward with colleagues.

Recommendation five, pupils missing out on education, the Programme Board continued to meet every three weeks. The meetings were themed, with an example given of work with the Virtual Headteacher for looked after children on ensuring looked after children in Staffordshire achieve well.

Communication directly with Chair of Governors was valued and the Cabinet Member, Learning and Skills, informed the Select Committee that efforts were also being taken to ensure there was direct email contact with all Governors, however all email addresses were not currently held. In some instances a minority of governors seemed unwilling to use email.

School performance in the Cannock Chase area was raised and Members asked what work was being undertaken to help school improvement. On 28 July the Commissioner for Education and Wellbeing was meeting with the Cannock Chase Local Strategic Partnership to identify local level priorities. There was a move towards more local level commissioning. During this academic year the focus from the LA had been on individual schools to support their progression into “good” and “outstanding” school categories, however during the next year there would be a move towards identifying district trends and how to address these.

The Cabinet Member, Learning and Skills, informed the Select Committee that he had been in discussion with one of the sponsors for Norton Canes and Heath Hayes and would soon be able to share some astonishing results. There was a responsibility on the LA to monitor all schools, regardless of whether they were an academy or a maintained school, and there was a need to ensure that all Staffordshire children were supported. He welcomed the move towards regional commissioning from September in respect of academies.

The Vice Chairman updated Members on the work of the Select Committee Working Group on Children Missing out on Education (CME) which had been set up as a result of recommendation five. The Working Group had written to HMRC, the Children’s Commissioner and the Education Minister highlighting concerns over children missing from the education system and the potential safeguarding issues where these children were unknown to the LA. The Working Group were currently awaiting a response. The Cabinet Member, Education and Skills, congratulated the Vice Chairman and his working group on the work they had undertaken and specifically in identifying a gap in the system and their efforts in trying to address this.

RESOLVED – That a) the formal response of the Cabinet Member, Learning and Skills, be received;

b) that the action shown within the Executive Action Plan and the subsequent update given during the meeting be welcomed;

c) a six monthly update on the work of the Ofsted Programme Board be included on the Select Committee’s work programme; and

d) that the action plan and implementation of the agreed recommendations be monitored by the Select Committee.

5. Work Programme Planning

The Select Committee received a report of the Scrutiny and Support Manager on work programme planning for 2014-15. The report set out the work completed over the last municipal year, and the areas of work already highlighted and/or carried over to the new municipal year.

The libraries consultation was currently underway and officers had suggested that the Select Committee may wish to consider this issue in September, for an update, and again in December with the results of the consultation. Members felt that September was too early to receive a report as the consultation would not be completed. Members raised their concerns that consultation forms were running out in a number of libraries and asked that officers be informed of this issue as a matter of urgency.

The Chairman explained that this was a flexible document that would be added to throughout the year.

Members also requested a list of individual schools performance so that they could monitor progress.

RESOLVED – That: a) the flexible nature of the work programme be noted; b) the existing carry over items be accepted; and c) the report on library consultation be considered at the conclusion of the consultation rather than in September.

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.