

**Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 12 October 2015**

Present: Simon Tagg (Chairman)

**Attendance**

Maureen Compton	Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf
Tim Corbett	Paul Woodhead
Carol Dean	Mike Worthington
Ian Hollinshead	Candice Yeomans
David Loades (Vice-Chairman)	

**Also in attendance:** Gill Heath and Mark Winnington

**Apologies:** Len Bloomer, Geoff Martin and Sheree People

**PART ONE**

**18. Declarations of Interest**

Mr Paul Woodhead declared an interest in minute number 20 in his capacity as “OurstoEnjoy” campaign organiser on the 38 Degrees website.

**19. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 4 September 2015**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 4 September 2015 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

**20. Countryside Estate Review**

The Select Committee had previously received details of the Countryside Estate Review at its meeting of 18 December 2014 and 4 September 2015. A small group of members had also visited a number of sites across the County with members of the Ranger Service, and had reported their findings to the Select Committee.

At its 4 September meeting the Select Committee had considered and made recommendations on the ten potential options identified for managing the estate as part of an initial engagement process with critical stakeholders. The results of the initial engagement process and of a benchmarking exercise had now been analysed and a number of options discounted.

Four options remained:

Option A: Maintain the current arrangement and enhance the development strategy	Continue with the current management and ownership arrangement but develop strategies with the aim of increasing income from individual sites and boosting community involvement	This option is most suitable for Chasewater, Cannock Chase and the other country parks with visitor centres.
Option B: Transfer management, so that it is decided on a site by site basis to more than one provider	Seek partnership arrangements with local community or voluntary sector groups e.g. 'Friends of' Groups' or Parish Councils whereby they could acquire leasehold or take over the management of one or more sites via appropriate leasing arrangements.	This option is more suitable for the smaller country parks and picnic sites and greenways.
Option C: Multi-Agency Partnership	Establish a multi-agency partnership of landowners to actively manage all green space sites in a specific area. This could include pooling of resources and skills to generate economies of scale.	This option is equally applicable across the estate
Option D: Establish a not for profit trading company or Community Interest Company	The body would be responsible for running and developing part / all of the estate but Staffordshire County Council would retain ownership.	This option is equally applicable across the estate

Members heard that these options were not mutually exclusive and a combination of options could be considered where appropriate.

At their 4 September meeting the Select Committee had indicated they could support options 2, 8 and 9, and option 5 with an amendment to the wording. The four options now proposed included option C "to establish a multi agency partnership of landowners to actively manage all green space sites in a specific area." This correlated with option 6 from the previously considered 10 options and Members asked the Cabinet Member, Economy, Environment and Transport, what his rationale had been for including this option when the Select Committee had indicated they were unable to support it. The Cabinet Member indicated that whilst he had sought Select Committee's views on the options the decision was his to make based on what he felt offered best management of sites. Members asked that, in light of this, the sentence at point 9 in the report saying "These options are in line with the Select Committee's recommendations on 4 September" should be removed as it was incorrect.

Members noted that since their 4 September meeting three sites had been excluded from the review and asked the reason for this. The Cabinet Member indicated that these three sites, Broad Lane, Essington, Fair Oak, Essington and Branston, had no public access and did not fit into the Countryside Estate Review. They had therefore been removed from the Review and would be considered by the Penda Property Partnership.

The Select Committee suggested that to enable effective consultation there needed to be greater clarity on the four options being considered. After some debate it was agreed that examples could be given to illustrate the options. Members emphasised the need for those taking part in the consultation to understand the options being presented and what these could look like in practice.

No figures had been included in the report showing savings that could be made dependent on the options chosen and Members asked whether an estimated saving had been identified. The service currently cost £1 ½ m to maintain and the Cabinet Member wanted to ensure Staffordshire residents were getting the best offer they could, however no saving figure had been identified.

**RESOLVED – That:**

- a) the following sentence at point 9 of the report be removed: “These options are in line with the Select Committee’s recommendations on 4 September”;
- b) greater clarity be given to the 4 options prior to the formal consultation process, to include illustration of how each option could work; and
- c) a further report be brought to the Select Committee with the consultation results prior to April 2016 Cabinet decision on this issue.

## **21. The Growth Fund including the work of the Education Trust**

The Select Committee received a presentation on progress to date of the Staffordshire Growth Deal and the Education Trust. The Growth Deal included a range of infrastructure, transport, skills and town centre projects across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent to the value of £153m. These projects had the potential to create more than 11,000 jobs, facilitate the delivery of 8,000 new homes and improve outcomes for more than 1,000 learners by 2021 across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

Members considered a list of projects and an overview of progress made, highlighting the Meaford Major Employment Site, Bericote Four Ashes and the Stafford Weston Access Route. The Lichfield Park project was due to be completed in November with the potential to create 1100 new jobs in this high quality employment site. This had been the first Growth Deal project to go live, mainly due to the restricted time schedule for demolishing the railway bridge, which had to be completed over a 48 hour period during Christmas and Boxing Day 2014. The County Council’s engineers were praised for the fantastic work they had done in ensuring this work was completed within that very tight timescale and with the least disturbance to the general public. The new bridge would allow HGV access to the site.

Members had received a draft copy of the Education Trust Skills Strategy 2015-2020. It was widely acknowledged that there was a direct correlation between skills, productivity and employment. Securing a well-qualified and adaptable workforce with the skills sets

appropriate to the needs of existing business sectors as well as those in which the County had aspirations for economic growth should be fundamental priorities for economic development. The Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) Education Trust was a crucial part of realising these aspirations.

The Education Trust worked with business, business groups, education, training providers and the public sector to raise aspirations and achievement. There were an ambitious set of projects driven by the Trust to bring business closer to the education sector. The Trust's vision was to shape a high performing, relevant and responsive education and skills system that met today's business needs and anticipated the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow. The Trust aimed to increase the number of people in employment, particularly in growth sectors, and growth in productivity as people and businesses had the right skills and opportunities to use them in work.

It was an ambition to create 50,000 jobs within Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent over the next 5 years and to create 80,000 apprenticeship starts in the same time period. A Staffordshire Apprenticeship Ladder had been developed to ensure more businesses were aware of the benefits of apprenticeships and that more young people were apprenticeship ready. Thirty-two businesses had signed up to this already. Members heard of the Apprenticeship Business Helpline set up as part of the Growth Hub and of the Annual Apprenticeships awards and graduation ceremony. 500 higher apprenticeships were being co-commissioned to increase the progression to higher level skills.

There was an ambition to improve information, advice and guidance around apprenticeships to enable young people and adults to make informed choices regarding their career pathways. Clear progression pathways were being developed from school and college to enable young people who wanted an apprenticeship to be ready and aware of the opportunities in the local community. An all age career guidance strategy would be developed to provide a high quality and standardised career guidance offer.

Members heard about the Adults Skills Pilot, one of only three skills pilots in the country. This project attempted to align over £20m of skills and training investment delivered by FE Colleges with the key sector priorities for the area and was demonstrating a shift in more students taking higher courses in the growth sectors. An advanced manufacturing and engineering hub had secured investment from the City Deal and the Growth Deal through the LEP with £12m of public and private investment for 4,000 students and apprentices and 345 businesses. Members also heard about the ambition to create a Skills for Growth Hub, providing employer led skills programmes and developing programmes aimed at engaging and equipping individuals through education and training to meet their potential. A business led steering group would be established to oversee the Skills Hub.

Members asked for clarification on the difference between an apprenticeship and a traineeship. The traineeship was a pre-apprentice programme which improved young people's initial skill set, including their English and Maths, to enable them to achieve the required skills to access apprenticeship courses. Members felt basic English and Maths skills should be acquired in schools and had concerns that this was not being addressed.

The Select Committee asked whether the 80,000 apprenticeship starts in 5 years was a realistic figure. Last year had seen the number of apprenticeships double and whilst there was clearly still a lot of work to do the target was achievable. Members also asked how many of these apprenticeships actually resulted in a job offer at the end and referred to the old YTS schemes where very often there had been no job opportunity at the end of the placement. Nationally 90% of individuals undertaking an apprenticeship programme ended in full time employment.

Members asked for clarification on those referred to as inactive and were informed that these were people who were not actively looking for work due to, for example, ill health. EU funding was available to support work with people who face complex barriers to move into work.

Members asked whether there were enough FE college places in Staffordshire, particularly in engineering and science. They were informed that this was a critical area, with £3m investment within engineering across Tamworth and Stoke FE Colleges and Martec private training provider. Investment of £9m at the Rodbaston site of South Staffordshire College had been agreed for 2016 creating an agricultural STEM centre (science, technology, engineering and maths).

The Select Committee was informed that a review of FE colleges was being undertaken. The Cabinet Member, Economy, Environment and Transport, informed Members that the FE sector would be contracting and in future it was likely that FE colleges would have a specific specialism, offering courses around that identified specialism. He explained that Ofsted would have a part to play in ensuring colleges were providing good quality education and learning.

The key to a healthy economy was ensuring Staffordshire had a mixed economy. STEM courses were a high priority as they formed the base skills for many jobs leading to a wide range of pathways.

**RESOLVED** – That the Select Committee welcomes the progress made in relation to the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Deal and Education Trust.

## **22. Libraries in a Connected Staffordshire - Part 5 Mobile and Travelling Library Review**

The Select Committee had previously received details on work to reposition and adapt the mobile and travelling library service at its meeting of 1 June 2015. Initial proposals for this service had been developed following an analysis of use, financial performance and six principles that aimed to ensure people with the greatest need continued to have access to the mobile and travelling library service.

Recent analysis had demonstrated that a small percentage of the Staffordshire population were members of the Mobile and Travelling Library Service, being 2.7% of total visits to all Staffordshire Libraries in 2014/15, visits had also declined by 15% during the last four years. Members received details of the communities reached and the current stops made by the Service and of the costs involved.

Public consultation on the proposals had taken place between 1 July and 2 September 2015. 1054 responses had been received to the consultation, which equated to 10% of all registered users and over a quarter of all active borrowers. Over 400 people engaged in public events. 94% of respondents agreed with the principle to continue providing a service to those in greatest need. 52% of respondents indicated the proposed changes would make it more difficult to access the service. 75% of respondents indicated they would continue to use the Mobile and Travelling Library service, with 12% indicating they would use a static library instead.

Members received details of the proposals, which were around the number , and length of stops, and the routes taken. The Select Committee also received details of changes made as a result of the consultation to proposed routes. 24 people would require a housebound service as a result of the proposals. The loan period would also be extended to four weeks to coincide with the two weekly timetable of travelling library visits. A saving of £350,000 to the annual budget for the Mobile and Travelling Library Service would be realised if the proposed realignment outlined to Members were agreed.

Members asked whether multi use of the vehicles had been considered, working with partners to provide a range of services. Shared use had been undertaken in the past, with an example given of careers guidance information being given. This shared use would be developed in the future, similarly to existing partnership use within the static library service.

The home reader service was becoming increasingly important, with closer working with adult health and social care. This service also offered wider benefits for service users, often building close supportive relationships.

The Select Committee asked what impact the proposed service changes would have on staffing. There would be a staff reduction, with a 9.28 full time equivalent (fte), leaving 9.81fte staff members.

**RESOLVED – That:**

- a) the proposed realigned model for Staffordshire’s Mobile and Travelling Library Service be noted;
- b) Officers be congratulated on the thoroughness of this process and their endeavour in amending proposals where appropriate as a result of the consultation findings; and
- c) a future report be brought to the Select Committee analysing how the changes have impacted on service users.

**23. Work Programme**

The Select Committee received a copy of their current work programme. Members were reminded that the Heavy Goods Vehicle Inquiry Days were taking place in October and November. Entrust were due to attend a Select Committee meeting in January 2016 and Members suggested a preparation meeting be held at the conclusion of their December meeting to consider the range of questions and information they would request from Entrust representatives.

**RESOLVED** – That the work programme be noted.

**Chairman**