

Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 3 March 2017

Present: Simon Tagg (Chairman)

Attendance

Ann Beech	Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf
David Brookes (Vice-Chairman)	Sheree People
Kevin Jackson	Paul Woodhead
Mike Lawrence	Candice Yeomans

Also in attendance: Ben Adams

Apologies: Len Bloomer, Ian Hollinshead, Geoff Martin and Mike Worthington

PART ONE

37. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

38. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 19 January 2017

That the minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 19 January 2017 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

39. Skills and Employability Self-Assessment

Members were informed that Skills and Employability focused on a range of education and training opportunities to fulfil statutory duties, meet the needs of learners, the economy and the wider community and supports delivery of the LEP Skills Strategy. The portfolio of work covered included Community Learning, Intermediate and Advanced Apprenticeships and adult classroom based learning. The Select Committee considered the quality and performance of the learning and skills delivered as part of the service.

The Self-Assessment Report was a fundamental tool that Ofsted Inspectors used to judge the quality and effectiveness of an organisation in providing education opportunities to young people and adults. Members also scrutinised the quality assurance and performance of the portfolio of learning and skills provision commissioned by the Skills and Employability Team, in order to further improve quality, outcomes for learners and in remaining a good FE and Skills provider.

The Self-Assessment Report 2015/2016 had assessed the Council as “good” in all areas except “outcomes for learners” for Apprenticeships, where the service has

assessed itself a “requiring improvement”. Members received a presentation which provided an overview of the findings of the report, and a video which showed some of the work being undertaken at Moreton Farm, and the impact which this had on learners’ lives.

The Skills and Employability Service commissions and direct delivers learning and skills through 32 providers, directly through its Direct Delivery Unit and through four main strands of delivery (2016/2017 academic year):

- Community Learning
- Community Learning Trust Responsiveness Fund
- Apprenticeships
- Classroom based learning (including Direct Delivery)

Members were informed that the service had undergone a transformation, in that in 2014 60% of the provision had related to leisure learning and 40% to disadvantaged learners, this had now changed to 35% leisure and 65% disadvantaged learners. However it was acknowledged that leisure courses were important in their own right, a fact evidenced by the personal experience of one of the Select Committee co-opted members.

With regard to the breakdown in funding over the last three years, members requested that this be provided on a District basis. Members were also interested to know what had happened to apprentices following their training, and requested details of the destination surveys which were done six months after their apprenticeship was completed.

In relation to statistics on the Learner Enrolments by district in 2015/2016 it was queried why Tamworth had the second lowest number of enrolments but was the biggest centre of population and highest levels of deprivation, with a similar situation in Newcastle under Lyme. Members were informed that a number of factors affected the figures, from opportunities to access provision from over the borders of Staffordshire, commissioning priorities, and difficulties in securing providers in some instances.

RESOLVED – That:

a) the quality assurance and performance of the learning and skills service within the Skills and Employability team be noted; and the findings of the Skills and Employability 2015-2016 Report for Learning and Skills provision, in order to further improve quality and performance in preparation of achieving a good outcome in a FE and Skills Ofsted Inspection, be noted.

40. Progress on the SEND Reforms

The Committee received a further update on the progress and impact of the SEND Reforms in Staffordshire and scrutinised the progress to date in undertaking the transfer process.

On 1 September 2014 the special educational needs and disability reforms came into effect as part of the Children and Families act 2014, and set out significant changes to the way in which children and young people with SEND were supported. These included:

- The introduction of an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) for 0-25 year olds to replace Statements of Special Educational Needs and a duty to transfer where appropriate Learning Difficulty Assessments (LDAs) to EHCPs by March 2017 and Statements to EHCPs by March 2018.
- The publication of a “Local Offer” setting out in one place information about provision local authorities expect to be available across education, health and social care for children and young people in their area who have SEN or are disabled.
- The introduction of joint commissioning arrangements to ensure integration between education, social care and health to enable partners to make best use of all the resources available in an area to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND in the most efficient, effective, equitable and sustainable way.
- The introduction of Personal Budgets for young people and parents of children with EHCPs, enabling them to have greater choice and control over SEND support.

Members were informed that the number of requests for EHCPs had continued to rise. The Council’s performance on completion of EHC assessments within the statutory 20 week timescale (84.46%) remained good. The number of special educational needs tribunal appeals had also increased. In discussions around the tribunal process members expressed concern on the impact that these can have on schools and the demands on head teachers’ time.

In considering the progress of transfers of statements of special educational needs and LDAs to EHCPs members noted that during the first year the number of completed transfers fell well below the expected levels as published in the transfer plan. This was largely due to delays in staff recruitment. The figures for the current academic year showed that a total of 28% of transfers had been completed. Whilst this meant that Staffordshire was behind schedule, plans had been put in place to address this and considerable additional resourcing had been made available from the SEND Reform Grant.

In relation to the Local Offer members were informed that this had two key purposes:

- To provide clear, comprehensive, accessible and up to date information about the available provision and how to access it.
- To make provision more responsive to local needs and aspirations by directly involving disabled children and those with SEN and their parents, and disabled young people and those with SEN, and service providers in its development and review.

Members were informed that there was a requirement for joint commissioning arrangements to cover the services for 0-25 year old children and young people with SEN or disabilities, both with and without EHCPs. A Joint Commissioning Strategy had been drafted and governance of joint commissioning arrangements were now overseen by the SEND Partnership Board.

A personal budget was an amount of money identified by the local authority to deliver provision set out in an EHCP, where the parent or young person was involved in securing that provision. There had been a small increase in the uptake of personal budgets rising from 1 to 3, which was in line with the national picture.

Members received details of how the SEND system in Staffordshire would be transformed going forward. Starting from Wednesday 1 March 2017 a core group of professional within the SEND system in Staffordshire will identify and study the SEND system from the perspective of the service user, with a view to making an evidenced based judgement on which aspects of the system can and should be re-designed to improve the outcomes for the children and young people in Staffordshire. This work would be undertaken on a place based approach focusing on South Staffordshire initially and be expected to last for up to 6 weeks.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) the update on the progress and impact of the SEND Reforms be noted;
 - b) the progress to date in undertaking the transfer process be noted; and
- the scrutiny of the progress in the next phase of SEND Transformation be continued via a further update after the May 2017 elections.

41. Making the Most of our Universities – Working in Partnership for Economic Growth

Members were informed that the County Council was committed to ensuring that the Staffordshire economy continued to grow and that everyone had access to a good job with good prospects. To deliver this commitment it was critical that Staffordshire residents were equipped with the skills local employers needed, now and in the future, and that it is easy for businesses to start up, innovate and expand.

The County Council recognised that universities were an essential partner in delivering both these goals, particularly in relation to the higher level skills the area needed and in relation to supporting innovative business growth. Recently the County Council had started to develop a more focused approach to working with Keele University through the Keele Deal and with Staffordshire University and Wolverhampton University through improved relationships. Given the extensive potential of universities to the economic growth agenda it was essential that the County Council derived maximum benefit from its interactions with all universities. The County Council should seek to maximise the benefits of economic growth through strengthening its relationships with universities, it would benefit from having a clear policy for engaging with the Higher Education Sector and for each local university a clear plan for how they would contribute to the area's economic growth agenda.

Members considered: the role universities could play in driving economic growth with reference to the national context and local partnership landscape; a proposed policy position in relation to the County Council's collaboration with the Higher Education sector; and suggested actions as to how to implement this.

The report had previously been discussed, amended and agreed by the Senior Leadership Team and Cabinet Members. If agreed, the policy would guide the County Council's interactions and relationships with the sector to ensure resources were being targeted effectively and obtaining the most benefit for Staffordshire residents and businesses. Members were invited to consider, discuss and comment on the policy position and proposed actions as part of its remit in assisting the Cabinet to develop policy.

In wide-ranging discussions Members agreed that it was important to look for opportunities to engage with organisations outside of the area. Officers provided details of a wide range of organisations across the Country offering different specialisms which the County Council could potentially work with. It was also important to encourage local colleges to offer courses that would attract and retain learners with high quality skills. Members also discussed the importance of encouraging local businesses to offer internships and employment, with input from Universities, and the importance of good quality, honest and relevant careers' advice.

In the current economic climate it was suggested that investment should only be made where there is a guaranteed return. The Cabinet Member pointed out that the potential creation of new high value jobs for residents through the large scale development of employment sites around the Country could be related to universities, and any conversation would be based around the question "Is this a good business deal?", so there would be no investment on the basis of an uncertain return.

Members also reflected on the need to link the County's ambitions with borough and district councils' local plans, specifically in regard to housing.

In summary, the recommendations were that Staffordshire County Council:

- engages with universities in line with the policy position set out in the report;
- ensures that all activity contributes to the key priority of delivering more high value, high productivity jobs within the area and ensuring that our residents are equipped with the skills required by future growth industries;
- sets out, in writing a clear plan for each local university recognising the individual strengths and contribution of each institution (as set out in the report) and providing clear details regarding proposed action and accountability;
- engages in regular, high level strategic dialogue to ensure the delivery of outcomes;
- works with any university that can benefit the communities and businesses of Staffordshire; and
- considers the potential role of FE Colleges in relation to specific work with universities and whether to develop a similar policy to maximise the value of our relationships with the FE sector.

RESOLVED – That the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee endorse the above recommendations.

42. Progress on the Countryside Estate

RESOLVED – That, in the absence of the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, this item be deferred until after the elections in May 2017.

43. Work Programme

The Select Committee received a copy of their 2016-17 Work Programme. Member noted that the following item be added:

- School Funding for the Future

RESOLVED – That the addition to the Work Programme be noted.

a) Update on the Library Service - Briefing Note

The Select Committee received a briefing note providing an update on the model for the library service which was agreed by Cabinet on 18 February 2015.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the briefing paper be noted.

Chairman