

Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 18 January 2018

Present: Ian Parry (Chairman)

Attendance

Ann Beech	David Smith
Maureen Compton	Simon Tagg
Keith Flunder	Bernard Williams
Julia Jessel (Vice-Chairman)	Candice Yeomans
Bryan Jones	

Also in attendance: Mark Sutton and Philip White

Apologies: Tina Clements, Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf and Paul Woodhead

PART ONE

69. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

70. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 15 December 2017

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 15 December 2017 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

71. Skills and Employability Self-Assessment and Adult and Community Learning - Quality Improvement Plan

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. The Select Committee considered and commented on the quality assurance and performance of the portfolio of the learning provision commissioned, in order to further improve quality, outcomes for learners and in remaining a good learning provider in Staffordshire.

Community Learning was an umbrella term describing a broad range of learning that brings together adults, often of different ages and backgrounds, to pursue an interest, address a need, acquire a new skill, become healthier or learn how support their children. It was mainly non-accredited and could be undertaken for its own sake or as a step towards other learning or work. It may happen in personal or work time and be delivered by providers in the public, private or voluntary community sectors across Staffordshire. Community Learning supported wider government policies on localism, social justice, stronger families, digital inclusion, social mobility and upskilling English and Maths skills and preparing for employment.

The funding comes from the ESFA as part of a national scheme. In 2015 Community Learning was re-commissioned and a decision was made to reduce the funding allocation of leisure programmes in order to focus on targeted provision. Targeted provision includes family programmes, provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities and those with enduring mental ill health, programmes to support employability and English, Maths and IT skills and more recently the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) provision. In the academic year 2014/15 the funding allocation for leisure provision was £577,000 and 60% of the total ESFA allocation and this decreased to £360,000 and 35% in 2016/17. Targeted provision increased from £384,000 and 40% of the total ESFA allocation in 2014/15 to £670,000 and 65% in 2016/17.

The Select Committee were shown a video, in which learners explained how a particular course had been of benefit to them. They were informed that the Community Learning offer aimed to target people who felt excluded from participating in society, and that 38.1% of learners were from wards of high levels of deprivation and a third of the learners had learning disabilities or difficulty with learning. The aim was to enable these learners to have better lives and be able to do more for themselves.

A member commented that the offer covered a broad scope and queried how this was narrowed down and focused on the outcomes which were trying to be achieved. The Cabinet Support Member referred to the programme areas outlined in the report and pointed out that there were a number of family learning schemes, which involved the whole family learning together and focused on core skills in English, Maths and Language. In relation to Adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities the focus was on improving independence and confidence. In the area of functional skills and employability skills the focus was on equipping people with the tools to go on to work. For the first time STEM had been identified in targeting in the 2017/18 contract to drive towards broader aims in terms of education and employability.

It was queried what the driver was behind the suite of courses on offer, and whether this was that they offered the broadest scope for most people. Members were informed that in moving from a leisure approach to a targeted approach in terms of commissioning for priority outcomes, there had been consultation with local stakeholders, community groups and Councillors about needs and priorities for their area, which was used to help shape and understand the pattern of need.

A question was raised about the breakdown between courses which provided a practical life skill and those which related to improved quality of life and wellbeing. In examining data on why learners engage on courses, around two thirds focus on health and wellbeing, and around a quarter are about learners improving their skills. In relation to the question of payback on public investment it was queried how it was known that people on the courses were not able to afford to fund their learning. The response was that this was largely down to course design and the communities and types of learner who were focused on. However, it was intended that the courses provided open learning and consequently learners were not means tested.

Members questioned the robustness of the self-assessment process and commented that the report was light on methodology and validity. They were informed that the

authority was an Ofsted regulated learning and skills provider so was regulated under the same framework for self-evaluation as that seen in schools and colleges, against a common inspection framework. This was also supported by an annual review and peer reviews. There was a re-inspection in March when Ofsted had confirmed that the authority remained a good provider, that the self-assessment process was robust and that they supported the authority's findings.

In relation to the Family English, Maths and Language programme it was queried whether the objectives had changed around this, as there had been a 12.5% reduction in the target achievement figure. Members were informed that there had been a specific issue last year in that the two biggest providers, Stafford College and South Staffordshire College, had withdrawn from the programme. This was a reflection of a wider issue around Colleges not wanting to deliver teaching in Maths and English. However, other providers were being sought and it was hoped to bring this figure back up.

It was suggested that, given that the County Council is moving forward as a paperless organisation and much more was being done on-line, it was important to focus on IT training and increasing confidence in the use of IT. The Cabinet Support Member agreed that every effort would be made to encourage learners to engage in Maths, English and IT. One of the objectives of Community Learning was to capture people who were completely disengaged and lacking in confidence. It was acknowledged that a number of schools were used to deliver courses, and questioned whether this could also be extended to libraries. The Cabinet Support Member agreed that libraries represented an excellent resource and community hub, and it was important to get best value for the investment in keeping them open. Another advantage was that people would go to a library who wouldn't go elsewhere. There were some excellent library volunteers, and it may be possible to involve some of these in training, particularly in IT. It would also be important to encourage schools to open their doors after hours and make schools more visible in their communities.

Concern was expressed over the disparity between male and female learners, with 71% being female and less than a third male. It was confirmed that work was being undertaken to balance this out more, and whilst the percentage reflected some women preparing to return to work after maternity leave this did not account for such a significant difference.

A co-opted member of the Select Committee shared her experience as an adult learner in Staffordshire, and how this had increased her confidence, helped her to acquire skills which had led to employment and had had a big impact on her life.

In relation to the list of subcontractors, a member commented that the use of schools would keep costs down, as they are buildings already available in communities, and often have skills available in-house. Consequently the more schools that could be involved, the better. Given the size of Staffordshire it was felt that the list for third sector organisations was very light, and needed to be expanded. With regard to the County Council column it was commented that Entrust was not the most economical way of delivering courses. The Cabinet Support member endorsed these comments and agreed that more third sector organisations should be involved, together with libraries and schools.

Concern was expressed that there were gaps in the report. The figures were activity based, and there was not much evidence in the report to support outcomes. With a £2.4m budget, the Select Committee was tasked with ensuring value for money. It would be helpful to know how many learners achieved employment in six months, and how many were still in employment in twelve months, in a report which measured outcomes. There was also no indication whether individuals were accessing multiple courses. Whilst the report highlighted the fact that 38.1% of learners came from deprived areas, it would be helpful to have more data on the distribution of students to evidence that the right areas were being targeted for the right outcomes. The Cabinet Support member agreed that he would like to see outputs that it was possible to measure, and the direction of travel was away from leisure towards areas which were measurable. However, it was important not to push learners away in trying to measure their achievements. For the future more evidence of specific wards which were being targeted would be included.

In response to the question of how members can become more engaged in Community Learning, the Cabinet Support member suggested that they become a school governor, and be positively involved in pushing forward the agenda in terms of schools broadening their scope and community roles.

In relation to the increase of 0.6% in the target achievement on Employability Skills, it was queried whether how many people were in work as a result of this was measured. The response was that a sample progression survey was conducted six months after a course is completed, based on the learning outcome, not a job outcome. This had shown that 27% of learners had moved into work having completed their course. The Cabinet Support member assured the Select Committee that this was an area he was keen to examine closely for the future. There would also be more explicit detail in the report on the follow-up action taken.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) The performance and quality assurance of Community Learning and the findings of the 2016/17 annual Self-Assessment Report be noted; and

Future reports on this matter provide the additional detail requested by the Select Committee.

72. School Attainment and Improvement

Staffordshire showed a positive direction of travel in terms of the percentage of schools judged as Good or Outstanding (and the percentage of all pupils that attended these schools). As at 1 September 2017 89% of Staffordshire schools were judged as good or outstanding, an increase of three percentage points since the same point in 2016 and the fourth highest year-on-year improvement of their statistical neighbour local authorities. The 2017 target of 92% was not met, however Staffordshire improved at a faster rate than the national average during 2016/17. The percentage of pupils attending schools graded good or outstanding had increased from 82% in August 2016 to 85% in August 2017.

The new primary and secondary accountability measures introduced in 2016 and the further changes to Key Stage 4 in 2017 with the introduction of “9-1” reformed GCSEs in English and Maths continued to limit trend comparisons over time. Levels of attainment

and progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Key Stage 1 (KS1) remained strong and continued to outperform national levels of performance. In 2017, attainment at the end of Key Stage Two (the primary phase) improved by more than the improvements seen nationally. Staffordshire results were now above national in all key measures.

The focus in 2017/18 would continue at Key Stage Two (KS2), Key Stage Four (KS4) and Key Stage Five (KS5) where there remained variations in attainment and progress of schools. Further improvements were required to gain ground in the rates of attainment and progress achieved by their statistical neighbours and nationally, particularly at KS4 and KS5. Staffordshire schools also needed to continue to do more to tackle variations in attainment and progress between localities and for different pupil groups, such as those eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) or Disadvantaged pupils (DA).

Education and Skills was a key priority that would be developed in the County Council Strategic Plan 2018/2022 and would set out how working with all their partners they would:

“Offer Staffordshire parents and their children high performing early years provision, schools and colleges to attend. Encouraging and helping parents to become more involved in and ambitious for their child’s education, whilst influencing early years settings, schools, colleges and universities to support each other to improve, excel and contribute fully to their communities.”

In response to a question about his role in Education the Cabinet Member informed the Select Committee that if young people come out of school better educated and better able to play an active and positive part in society they will prosper and do better, and their children would be more likely to do the same. This would also be likely to have a positive effect on their health outcomes and the number of children coming into the County Council’s system from a childcare, looked after and safeguarding perspective would be lower than it currently is. Also the local authority has a statutory obligation around school improvement.

It was questioned what the County Council had to do with Education, what levers and pulleys were available to have an impact, and did the authority have any powers and influences to make a difference. The Cabinet Member responded that it was really important that the authority could act in a way that helps parents and schools to work better together to improve schools. There were pulleys which could be used, and this would be explored in a piece of work moving forward. When looking to buy a house, one of the biggest drivers of cost is the standard of schools in the area. There were big drivers there for the authority to work with schools, not do the work for schools or take responsibility, but to work together as Staffordshire Education in its totality to improve and move from where we are now at 89% of schools good or outstanding going forward and ensure that the good results were not just in the early Key Stages, but all the way through.

Our role was not to run individual schools, but there was still a part for the authority to play in the overall picture. Work was being done on a paper which would be brought to this Committee in the future. The authority worked very much as an enabler representing parents where schools were not achieving in the way they should, making sure that a referral was made to the Schools Commissioner if the school was an

academy, holding the school and school governors to account. Also ensuring that parents can see how schools were performing enabling them to make informed choices.

The Cabinet Member was asked if he was taking a measure of responsibility for School Attainment by bringing this report forward, suggesting that the County Council had some influence to support or to improve that. The response was that the authority had a big influence around Early Years. However, responsibility for improvement lies with the schools themselves. A member commented that as more schools became academies the local authority would have less and less influence. The direction of travel was for schools to run themselves, particularly those in MATs. Members were informed that the authority had a good relationship with the Schools Commissioner and worked closely together and had some joint projects in Staffordshire. The Government passported funding through the local authority, and there was a desire amongst schools for the authority to be involved, as some schools experienced a sense of disconnect. There was also an element of the authority being stewards of taxpayers money and having a responsibility to ensure that this is well spent and delivering good outcomes.

Members were informed that the authority also had a role as influencer in relation to the Strategic School Improvement Fund, for which bids could be made for funding to support particular priorities within regions. The local authority has a role to play in providing information around the performance of particular schools to the teaching schools within their areas in order for them to provide that support and challenge.

The Chairman of the APMG on Innovation informed members that it was undertaking a piece of work around children's emotional and mental wellbeing, and had recently interviewed representatives from eight schools as part of this work. It was important for the Committee to be aware that other work was taking place in relation to wellbeing and hopefully outputs from schools in the long term. He also reported that the Government Green Paper would be out by 2 March, and the APMG would be pursuing funding from the additional £300m which was being proposed.

Concern was expressed that although Staffordshire ranked relatively highly in the Early Years and KS1, the ranking dropped progressively and was much lower across the secondary key stages. Given the positive effects of the input in Early Years learning it was queried whether there was an expectation that this would filter through the later key stages and produce improvements. Clarity was requested on what had been done and what action was planned, accepting the limitations the authority had. In writing to schools and governors it was questioned how these were targeted, and how improvements would be made, particularly in the latter years, where performance was in the fourth quartile. This was not just about academic achievement, but about providing a well-rounded education. The Cabinet Member responded that there had been improvement in Early Years for the past three to four years, from 50% achieving good levels of attainment to 74%, but there was still work to be done, by targeting families early. Pupils at KS1 also achieved a good level of development, as a result of the improvement at the Early Years stage. However, attainment then tailed off, which had been a general trend for a number of years. This was a cause for concern, particularly in the secondary phase where it dropped off considerably at the end of sixth form. The Cabinet Support member confirmed that he had been focusing on this issue. The Early Years investment was tracking through into KS1 and KS2 as the first cohort to benefit from the changes which had been made. Pupils experienced a dip in performance at

secondary level, and the aim was to make this as shallow a dip as possible, or eliminating it completely, so that pupils were more ready to engage with their learning. There was a lot of focus on encouraging schools to have more of a sense of community and of being Staffordshire schools and schools within their district, where their problems are shared problems, rather than wanting to get rid of the less able/difficult pupils in order to boost exam results.

Another member from the APMG commented that the issues around the drop off in attainment were very complex. Three aspects that had come out of the recent meeting with schools were poor parenting, the use of social media and pupils, particularly girls, not taking up sport. There was very little discussion about the curriculum or pressure with exams. It was queried what the Council could do in terms of improving schools. It was felt that the work done by the APMG would prove valuable in terms of making recommendations to Cabinet around what the authority could do to support families in particular around engaging better with schools and ensuring the pupils do better. In one school a centre had been set up as a support mechanism for pupils and parents and a quarter of the pupils had gone to the Unit for some support. The Cabinet Support member reiterated that there was a real drive to encourage schools to own these sort of issues. It was important that schools understand that this was part of driving their performance and was intrinsic for improvement, and was an area where the authority could have more influence than it could over some of the more technical educational aspects. It was acknowledged that wider school engagement was very important, and that schools recognised that they were a centre, not just an institution. It was queried whether greater academisation would lead to less local accountability, and how could this be overcome. It was suggested that current arrangements provided a fairly weak line of accountability. The Cabinet Support member responded that there was further work to do, but was probably best done at a district level, getting schools to work together within their districts and to have that shared accountability, and be more engaged as community schools.

A member commented that it was important to empower parents, who often didn't realise how they could, and should, influence school governors and don't really understand how the system worked. Consequently parents needed to be educated as to how they could influence, and also their responsibilities. It has to be a partnership and where there were support facilities for pupils and their parents this was important, as parental engagement was essential. In relation to governors, the Cabinet Support member suggested that the authority needed to strengthen this group and promote the role. There also needed to be a focus on those families who needed support and had difficult family situations. Also it was important to be mindful that this was not just about deprived areas, but also in more affluent areas, parents do not always engage.

Members discussed the pros and cons of amalgamating primary and high schools. It was acknowledged that some through schools did exist and that faith schools often did this. It was pointed out that Multi-Academy Trusts brought schools together, and also Federations.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) The progress of Educational Achievement in Staffordshire for the period September 2016 - August 2017 be noted; and

- b) The Cabinet Member and Cabinet Support Member note the comments and recommendations of the Select Committee in regard to the approach set out in the report.

73. Work Programme

The Select Committee received a copy of their 2017/18 Work Programme. Members noted that the item on the Economic Growth Capital and Development Programme was to be deferred.

RESOLVED That the Work Programme be noted.

a) School Funding Formula (Briefing Note)

Following two consultations the Department for Education had announced a National Funding Formula (NFF) for schools. This would come into effect in time when the “hard” formula was introduced. From 1 April 2018 local authorities could choose to transition to the NFF with political approval. A recommendation was being taken to the Cabinet that Staffordshire schools should transition to the NFF to take advantage of the per pupil protections and to ensure a smooth transition when the hard formula was implemented.

RESOLVED – That the Briefing Note be received.

Chairman