

Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 31 July 2017

Present: Simon Tagg (Chairman)

Attendance

Tina Clements	David Smith
Keith Flunder	Paul Woodhead
Julia Jessel (Vice-Chairman)	Candice Yeomans
Jeremy Pert	

Also in attendance: Mark Deaville, Gill Heath, Philip White and Mark Winnington

Apologies: Ann Beech, Maureen Compton, Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf and Bernard Williams

PART ONE

44. Declarations of Interest

David Smith declared an interest in relation to minute number 41 of the minutes of the previous meeting as he was in receipt of a doctorate from Staffordshire University.

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

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 3 March 2017 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

46. Supported Bus Network

Members were informed that over 90% of bus passenger journeys in Staffordshire were undertaken on the commercial bus network. The Authority currently provided funding for less than 10% of the bus journeys which were not commercially viable, and which provide connectivity across the county in support of the Authority's strategic objectives:

- To provide access to good jobs and feel the benefit of economic growth;
- Enable improved health and greater independence; and
- Enable people to feel safer, happier and more supported in their community.

The Authority had a statutory duty to secure public transport that it considered to be socially necessary.

In February 2016 the Council had agreed to provide a budget of £600,000 per annum from 2018/19 onwards which, when combined with the Bus Services Operator Grant, would provide a total budget of £1.3m to enable bus journeys which would not be possible on the commercial bus network. Significant work had been carried out over the last three years to reshape the Staffordshire supported bus network in order that connectivity was maintained and where possible improved to facilitate bus journeys to education, employment, essential public services, shopping and leisure purposes.

Following analysis of passenger data on a contract by contract basis, and taking into account the Authority's statutory duty under the Transport Act 1985, four options had been developed which provided a supported bus network within the approved financial envelope, as follows:

Option 1 – Revised Local Supported Bus Services (no Connect or Demand Responsive Services)

Option 2 – Revised Local Supported Bus Services with two Connect Services (South Staffordshire Connects and Moorland Connect)

Option 3 – Revised Local Supported Bus Services with Existing Connect Services Retained (Border Car excepted)

Option 4 – County-wide Connect and Demand Responsive Services (no local supported bus services)

Members were informed that no decisions had been made, although Option 1 was the preferred option as it retained the greatest number of existing bus journeys whilst minimising the public subsidy for each passenger trip. Currently in some cases this was costing £10 per journey. It was recognised that some previous travel opportunities via the Staffordshire Bus Network would be lost. However the Council already encouraged and provided support for voluntary and community transport schemes and was keen to see additional schemes come into operation.

An extensive eight week consultation was launched on 24 July 2017 and views would be sought from both individuals and organisations, and members considered the initial list of consultees. The consultation would explore the appetite from communities for the provision of additional voluntary transport schemes. Following the closure of the consultation on 17 September 2017 and a full analysis of the results it was intended that this would be presented to the Committee at their meeting on 14 November, prior to the Cabinet making the final decision on the shape of the Supported Bus Network on 15 November 2017. This would allow time for the new network to be introduced from April 2018 onwards.

A member commented that whilst they welcomed the consultation they had concerns about the impact of removing subsidies, particularly in relation to rural services which provided a lifeline for the growing elderly population, and queried whether this impact would be assessed and whether bus operators would continue to keep some services running. Members also expressed concerns about possible isolation in the rural community; the impact on the economy of reduced connectivity for students and employees; the need to promote public transport and the potential impact on the environment of increased car journeys. The Cabinet Member for Commercial agreed that green travel should be promoted and that he would identify pockets of rural isolation and encourage community and voluntary car schemes by pump priming schemes if necessary. It was agreed that the rural impact was provided and would be reviewed within the Community Impact Assessment. It was also requested that in Table 2 of the Assessment the abbreviations ENCTS (English National Concessionary Travelcard Scheme) and YSC (Your Staffordshire Card) be explained.

Members discussed the relationship that the Council had with bus operators and the need for them to promote their services using new technologies, for example the electronic display of routes and accurate times at bus stops. Members agreed that bus

operators should be encouraged to adopt a more innovative approach and challenged to improve their operational efficiency and provide more robust services. Suggestions included using smaller buses on some routes, and that bus travel for employees should be part of the planning consideration when new business parks were developed.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) the content of the report be noted and that a formal response to the consultation be sent from the Committee;
- b) the consultees, which will include a range of voluntary and community groups, be agreed; and
- c) it be noted that the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee will be asked to consider the outcome of the public consultation on the Supported Bus Network and make any appropriate recommendations, including endorsing a preferred option to Cabinet; and

the Committee's comments regarding the need for more innovation to encourage greater use of public transport be fed into the discussion that the Cabinet Member was leading with bus companies.

47. Introduction to the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee

The Committee received a presentation from Cabinet Members, the Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills and Commissioners from his and the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities team on key priorities for each of their areas for the coming year and suggestions for areas for scrutiny.

Members were informed that Economy, Infrastructure and Skills covered the following areas:

- Highways and Built County
- Learning and Skills
- Business and Enterprise
- Connected and Sustainable County

For each area members considered delivery plan priorities, "headline" information and potential Select Committee priorities for scrutiny. For Highways and Built County these were: highway works quality management; Staffordshire safer roads partnership and Infrastructure+ partnership performance. For Learning and Skills these were: post 16 education provision; skills and employability self-assessment report and the quality improvement plan. For Business and Enterprise these were: addressing the "final 4%" of the superfast Staffordshire broadband programme; reviewing the effectiveness of the economic growth programme, including the EU funding programme and achieving more higher value jobs for Staffordshire in light of our strategy. For Connected and Sustainable County these were: the supported bus network review; West Midlands Rail; a review of household waste recycling centres; fly tipping and the impact of HGVs.

In relation to the Families and Communities Team, members were informed that the vision of Culture and Communities was: "Culture and Communities encourages local people to participate in social and leisure activities and volunteer to support our services. This strengthens communities and improves health and wellbeing outcomes." Members received details of delivery plan priorities, resources and assets and figures

around engagement with details of visits, volunteering and participation in events. They also noted statistics in relation to Staffordshire Libraries 2016-17, and priorities around service areas.

With regard to the Rural County members noted that the main services areas were: country parks; rights of way; rural economy; rural communities and environmental advice. They also received details of assets and resources, “headline” facts and figures and priorities around service areas.

In considering the area of School Improvement, members were provided with an overview of the numbers of Staffordshire schools by category and numbers on roll, together with comparative data on performance both nationally and by statistical neighbours. They also received details of the outcomes of Ofsted Inspections between September 2016 and June 2017 in Staffordshire. Comparative Statistics, for Staffordshire and nationally, were also given on overall and persistent absences from schools. Members were informed of the ongoing priorities for 2016-17.

The Chairman commented that the copy of the presentation would provide a useful reference document for members of the Select Committee.

RESOLVED – That the content of the presentation be noted.

48. Developing the Work Programme

The Scrutiny and Support Manager presented a report on work programme planning which set out the remit of the Select Committee, considered methods of scrutiny and looked at work previously considered by this committee.

Consideration was given to the potential areas for scrutiny put forward in the earlier presentation and it was agreed that the Rights of Way Review should be included on the work programme. It was also agreed that Entrust Service Level Agreement Key Performance Indicator Working Group should be re-instated. An email would be circulated to members of the committee seeking volunteers to sit on this.

In relation to the scrutiny of the Infrastructure+ contract concern was expressed around quality control and that this issue should be included as part of the performance review. It was also requested that the Select Committee address the issue of BT Openreach abdicating their responsibility around the problems being experienced in rural areas with progress with the implementation of superfast broadband, and in particular the use of aluminium cabling.

Given the size of the proposed work programme for the coming year, including a range of additional items put forward by the Committee, it was agreed that the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Scrutiny Manager should meet to discuss the prioritisation of work going forward.

RESOLVED – That the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Scrutiny Manager be requested to prioritise items on the Select Committee’s work programme.

Chairman