

Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 19 July 2018

Present:

Attendance

Ron Clarke	Kyle Robinson
Tina Clements	David Smith
Julia Jessel (Vice-Chairman)	Simon Tagg
Bryan Jones	Bernard Williams
Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf	

Also in attendance: Helen Fisher, Mike Sutherland, Philip White and Mark Winnington

Apologies: Ian Parry

PART ONE

10. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

11. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 20 June 2018

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 20 June 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

12. Economic Growth Capital and Development Programme and Growth Hub

The Committee considered an update on the work and progress of the Staffordshire County Council Economic Growth Programme and details on the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub. Members discussed the progress of specific projects, employment change over time and the calculation of employment outcomes. New statistics showed that just 1.3 per cent of Staffordshire's population was claiming out of work benefits. The Staffordshire claimant count figure was lower than both regional (2.8 per cent) and national (2.1 per cent) averages. This figure had remained the same for the last two months. Since 2014, the county council had delivered or been involved in economy boosting-business development and infrastructure projects with a total value of more than £400million. For every £1 directly invested by the county council in the £204 million of projects currently 'live,' the county council had been at the heart of levering in £13.60 of private sector and other investment. 15 projects had now been completed, enabling growth at site including Redhill Business Park, IC5 at Keele, i54 South Staffordshire and Kingswood Lakeside in Cannock, and now Branston Locks - one of the most significant development sites in Staffordshire. Over 6,650 jobs had already been created on the completed sites generating over £9 million worth of total business rates every year. When fully developed and let, it was expected that £30 million of total

business rates would be generated from these sites, a proportion of which would support local public services. Up to 19,000 jobs were expected when the decade-long programme is complete. Now the infrastructure developments had generated more employment opportunities, a focus on bolstering small business and improving the skills of local people to meet demand was at the heart of the plan for the next six years. The six sites of the Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Hub was supporting over 4,500 trainees, and over 6,000 small to medium sized businesses had received the help they need to grow and prosper through the authority's administration of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub, on behalf of the Local Enterprise Partnership.

The Committee received a presentation on the work of the Growth Hub, which outlined its principles, what it can offer to businesses, its achievements over the past 4 years, the sectors it had supported, and the number of helpline calls and referrals made. Assistance through the Growth Hub was broken down into 3 broad "levels", from an initial light touch assist which often involved initial signposting, through more detailed business diagnostics and workshops, to intensive business intelligence assistance which could provide up to 12 hours of targeted assistance to businesses.

A member commented that it was good to see the economy doing well, and that it was important to monitor the quality of jobs. It was however a concern that often sites that had been identified as employment sites were overturned at the planning stage for residential development, and it was queried how these could be protected. The Cabinet Member for Economic Growth acknowledged that there was often pressure on business sites, but that this was a local planning authority decision. It was also questioned whether the Council was doing enough work around Brexit options, for example if there was no deal. The Cabinet Member reported that the Leader of the Council was actually in London that day to discuss Brexit with MPs. Efforts were being made to ensure that the various business sectors were vibrant and resilient. Members referred to a number of key projects in their local areas, and requested that a breakdown of jobs by district and employment sector be made available to all members.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) The work and progress of the Staffordshire County Council Economic Growth Programme and the Growth Hub be noted; and
- b) A breakdown of jobs by district and employment sector be provided to all members of the Council.

13. Elective Home Education Review

The Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) had made a referral to both the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee and the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee in respect of their concerns over potential vulnerability of Elective Home Education (EHE) pupils in Staffordshire. Following this referral the Chairman and Vice Chairman of both Select Committees gave consideration to whether there was value in considering this issue again after elements of EHE had been considered as part of the Children Missing Out On Education Working Group in 2014. As a result of the significant increase in EHE numbers, changes to many of the reasons for pupils becoming EHE, and changes to the EHE Policy, they felt a review would be beneficial.

Mr Paul Snape, the EHE Review Group Chairman, introduced the report. He thanked all those who had been involved and in particular those who had attended the inquiry day to help inform their considerations.

Members noted that the Review Group had been impressed by the time, resource, level of commitment and dedication shown by the parents they met who had elected to home educate their children. However they noted that those choosing to home educate for lifestyle/cultural/philosophical reasons, such as the parents that attended the inquiry, had reduced over the last three years. At the same time the number home educating to avoid risk of prosecution as a result of poor attendance had increased significantly, seeing a 27.4% rise over the last five years. There had also been a rise in the number home educating as a result of near exclusion (1.2% increase) and from emotional or behavioural difficulties (1.6%).

These changes were mirrored nationally and had prompted Ofsted's National Director (Social Care) to comment that for too many children and families home education was not a positive option and led to children not receiving an effective education. The Review Group acknowledged that the majority of Staffordshire schools act in the best interests of their pupils, however they had received anecdotal evidence of parents being coerced into "choosing" to home educate to avoid prosecution and/or exclusion. They had also received case studies which evidenced instances of coercion. To help mitigate this one of their recommendations was to request the Cabinet Member make representations to Ofsted with regard to a mechanism being developed to take account of the reasons for de-registration and, where there was a disproportionately high number de-registering to EHE, consider more closely the reasons behind this.

The Review Group also considered the issue of unregistered schools. Whilst the local authority was not currently aware of any such schools within the County, they felt everyone had a responsibility to be aware of and report any concerns over potential unregistered schools.

Members noted the support given by EHE parents in helping produce the parent handbook for potential EHE parents and in training events for LA staff. They also noted and supported the County Manager, Targeted Services, in his proposal to develop an annual event to celebrate the achievements of the EHE community.

The Review Group Chairman shared his concerns over the reduced officer resource for EHE when compared with the significant increase in EHE numbers. EHE numbers had increased by two thirds whilst the officer resource had decreased by two thirds. Whilst acknowledging the financial constraints within which the County Council currently worked, the Review Group had felt that there was a need to consider ways to increase the resource to help address the significant increase in EHE numbers.

Members also noted the support for a national registration scheme for EHE pupils. Registration had been supported by the 2014 working group and was again a national issue with the current Private Members Bill introduced by Lord Soley on Home Education.

Several members who had participated in the Review Group reiterated concerns around the potential for schools to be coercing parents to remove children. They also

commented that the intensity of input and sacrifices made by the parents who spoke to them was to be admired, and recognised the positive results which had been achieved when EHE had been used to address difficulties around bullying or mental health issues. In relation to the Gypsy Roma Traveller community becoming EHE a member pointed out that it was important to recognise and accept different cultures, and congratulated officers on the work undertaken to build relationships with this community.

The Select Committee congratulated the Review Group on their report and endorsed the recommendations for submitting to the appropriate Cabinet Member. As this was a joint review the report had also been considered by the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Select Committee endorse the final report and recommendations of the Elective Home Education Review and agree its submission to the appropriate Cabinet Members.

14. HS2 Construction Routes and Road Safety

Members were informed that the role of the County Council was to be the “voice” of Staffordshire and to secure, through petitioning and its place at the Planning Forum, the best possible mitigation for the County. The County Council also had a formal role in the delivery of the scheme: in influencing the development of key HS2 documents; through attendance at the local authorities’ planning forum; influencing HS2 communication processes and challenging on matters raised by the community; and processing consents and approvals under schedule 17 and schedule 4 of the Act (lorry routes and highways interferences respectively). The Phase One hybrid bill had completed the Parliamentary process in both houses and received Royal Assent in February 2017, making it an Act. This granted deemed planning permission for the construction, operation and maintenance of HS2 Phase One. On 17 July 2017, the Phase 2a hybrid bill was deposited in Parliament. The bill seeks powers to build the route from the West Midlands through Staffordshire to Crewe. This was at committee stage in the House of Commons, during which petitioners present their cases to Select Committee.

Through petitioning Phase One, the County Council had secured a lowering of 8km of the route in Lichfield and construction of the Handsacre link, connecting HS2 to the West Coast Mainline. Through petitioning Phase 2a, the County Council had secured a suite of highways improvements totalling approximately £10m, a range of mitigations for the Stone railhead, and a range of environmental improvements including protection for veteran trees and hedgerows.

In relation to communication with members, email updates were provided by the HS2 Project Manager, primarily to members affected by the line of the route, giving general scheme updates, and notifications of consultations and works. One-to-one meetings were held with the appropriate Cabinet Members and other one-to-ones would be made available on request. There were also regular updates to interested panels, for example Countryside and Rights of Way and the Staffordshire Air Quality Forum. Members were assured that a key point made repeatedly to HS2 Ltd. and contractors was that elected members should be made aware of information before anyone else, and especially before Parish Councils, so that they were prepared for questions as they arose. With

regard to complaints, the County Council was not resourced or funded to deal with HS2 complaints, and members were advised that all complaints or queries from members of the public should be directed to: HS2enquiries@hs2.org.co.uk or Freephone: 08081 434 434.

Members were informed that the County Council had been in discussion with HS2 Ltd. and other highway authorities along the line of the route to discuss matters of common interest. Getting the construction traffic routing correct was vital to ensure road safety matters were appropriately managed and the environmental impact was controlled. There would clearly be a significant impact on the public as the project moved to the main construction phase. The County Council had some limited powers over the approval of some types of HS2 construction route. Schedule 17 of the Act states that for a construction route where there were greater than 24 large goods vehicle movements in a day, consent must be obtained from the Highways Authority. However, if there were fewer than 24 heavy vehicle movements per day the Council had no control at all, nor did it have any control over routes used by non-heavy vehicles, even where numbers were significant. Where the County Council did have limited control on construction routing it was noted that if they refused a route, HS2 could appeal to the Secretary of State who could overrule them. Officers had been trying to avoid this situation through extensive engagement and through the additional highways improvements agreed in assurances. The Council had been advised that main civil engineering works were likely to commence in Spring 2019, but had just been informed that this had been put back to June 2019.

Members welcomed the reassurance that members would be informed of developments first, and asked for advice on how to make representations over any concerns they may have. It was a cause for frustration that members of the public looked to elected members to solve problems, when the reality was that in cases such as this Councillors did not have the authority to take action. It was stressed that information, and the flow of information, was very important.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) The work undertaken to date on efforts to influence HS2 construction routes be noted;
- b) The limited powers (as outlined in the phase 1 and phase 2a Hybrid Bill) available to the highway authority in respect of approving HS2 construction routes be noted; and
- c) Members assist in raising awareness of the HS2 Helpline and email for all queries and complaints regarding construction.

15. Work Programme

The Select Committee received a copy of their Work Programme for 2018/19. No additional items were suggested for inclusion.

Members were informed that the meeting which was scheduled for Tuesday 18 September 2018 was to be moved to Wednesday 19 September at 2.00 pm.

RESOLVED – That the Work Programme and change of date of meeting be noted.

16. Exclusion of the Public

17. Exempt Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 20 June 2018

(Exemption Paragraph 3)

18. Update on Section 53 Applications

(Exemption Paragraph 5)

Chairman