

Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 14 December 2018

Present: Ian Parry (Chairman)

Attendance

Ron Clarke	Kyle Robinson
Mike Deakin	Jessica Shulman
Keith Flunder	David Smith
Julia Jessel (Vice-Chairman)	Simon Tagg
Bryan Jones	Bernard Williams
Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf	

Also in attendance: Philip White

Apologies: Tina Clements

PART ONE

29. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

30. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 15 November 2018

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 15 November 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

31. Education and Skills Strategy: A Partnership Framework for Staffordshire

The Committee considered the Education and Skills Strategy which was currently out for consultation. Members were informed that, whilst Ofsted had judged that 84% of schools in Staffordshire were “Good” or “Outstanding”, overall outcomes for Staffordshire’s young people remained below average, particularly at Key Stage four and five. There was also too much variation between schools.

Improving Education and Skills “so that more people gain the training and qualifications they need to succeed” was one of the County Council’s strategic priorities. However the Council’s statutory role in education had diminished as the accountability of individual schools and trusts and the Regional Schools Commissioner had increased. There was now a complex mix of relationships and accountabilities which meant that no single institution or organisation could impose or affect significant, system-wide change on its own. The County Council championed better outcomes for children and young people but did not have the authority, responsibility, control or resources to determine those outcomes. The draft Education and Skills Strategy was a “partnership framework” developed by a reference group of education and skills providers and partners from

across Staffordshire. It proposed a shared leadership approach that was evidence based, outcomes-focused and underpinned by peer support and challenge. It was a strategy for Staffordshire, not a County Council strategy, and required the support of the Council and from across the education and skills sector. Members were informed that the role of local authorities in education had been evolving to focus on three key areas of responsibility: as a convenor of partnerships; as a champion of children, families and communities; and as a maker and shaper of effective commissioning. The consultation would run until 21 December 2018, after which the reference group would review the responses and it was anticipated that the final strategy would launch by April 2019.

A member commented that it was important to give sufficient consideration to the impact of children's mental health and wellbeing on school performance. The Cabinet Member responded that this strategy was overlaid with the SEND strategy and gave a commitment to put more funding into the High Needs Block should this become available. A member also commented that it would be important for the strategy to be more strident in stating the expectation of commitment from partners. It was essential that the Partnership Board had representatives from the appropriate level within the organisations that they were representing in order that they had the authority to make decisions. It was also suggested that the Board should draw on examples of best practice from schools in similar settings, and that greater emphasis should be put on the role of parents in the education system.

In order to enable better monitoring of variations members requested that the data on performance indicators contain a further breakdown by localities in Staffordshire. They also asked that details of the number of students who leave education and go on to employment be included, as well as details of the type of employment. Members recognised that there was a need to upskill the workforce in the County and that it was important to work with employers on this, so that more children left school "work ready" with a broader skills base. It was acknowledged that levels of aspiration were low in Staffordshire, and that the link between aspirations at primary school and the transition to secondary school should be investigated in more depth. A member commented that they would like to see an aspirational culture reflected throughout the education system and requested that within the principles included in the strategy the third principle be amended to say that every child and young person be "motivated" or "encouraged" to achieve. Members also commented that the phrase "equal opportunity" in this principle was questionable, given that there was competition for places in high performing schools. A Parent Governor representative queried whether the strategy only related to mainstream schools but was assured that it also aimed to raise attainment in special schools. Parent Governor representatives asked for the opportunity for a more creative conversation between parents and the local authority on education matters.

The Committee discussed what would be a reasonable timeframe to establish and embed the strategy and report back on progress. It was agreed that it should be at the end of the 2019/20 academic year.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) The comments of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee be fed into the Consultation Process; and
- b) An update on the progress on the Education and Skills Strategy be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

32. Review of Elective Home Education - Executive Response Action Plan

Members considered the Executive Response to the final report and recommendations of the Review Group on Elective Home Education. The Review Group had held an inquiry session where it had met with a range of Staffordshire parents who had elected to home educate their children, as well as head teachers and officers, to help establish the level of EHE in Staffordshire and the reasons for becoming EHE, specifically why the numbers of these had risen so significantly. The most significant rise in numbers was around poor school attendance and avoiding prosecution/exclusion. The Review Group had concerns over the reasons for this rise, which was mirrored nationally, and hoped that their recommendations would help to mitigate these concerns. Of the four recommendations which they had made, the Cabinet Member agreed three, namely:

- That the Cabinet Member support representations being made to Ofsted about the mechanism in place to take account of the reasons for de-registration and, where there is a disproportionately high number de-registering for EHE, consider more closely the reasons behind this.
- That the Cabinet Member consider how the annual event to celebrate the achievements of the EHE community can be supported and facilitated.
- That the introduction of a registration scheme for all children of statutory school age who are, or become, electively home educated be supported and that the Cabinet Member be asked to make representations and lobby in support of the current Private Members Bill introduced by Lord Soley on Home Education.

Members requested a copy of the letter which was to be sent to Lord Soley in support of his Bill.

In relation to the recommendation about staffing being increased in recognition of the significant increase in the numbers of EHE and the consequent implications to workload and resources the Cabinet Member responded that this would not be possible, given the significant financial challenges which the Council was facing. He informed members that he was exploring the possibility of recruiting teachers to analyse the EHE teaching curriculums which home educators were following. Members reiterated their concerns regarding the numbers of children taken out of schools, the possibility of parents being coerced into EHE, and potential safeguarding issues. They agreed that it would be important to continue to monitor this area in the future.

RESOLVED – That an update on Elective Home Education be brought to a future meeting of the Select Committee.

33. Work Programme

The Select Committee received a copy of their Work Programme for 2018/19. They noted that an item on the Car Parking Strategy had been added to the meeting in January 2019 and that the item on the Economic Growth Programme had been moved back to the March meeting. It was agreed that a follow-up item on the reorganisation of further and higher education arrangements with Entrust should be included for a future meeting.

The Chairman requested that the following guidelines be followed to in relation to presentations to the Select Committee: that they have no more than seven slides; that they be no longer than ten minutes; and that they be made by the relevant Cabinet Member.

RESOLVED – That the above additions/amendments to the Work Programme 2018/19 be agreed.

Chairman