

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

Present: Ian Parry (Chairman)

Attendance

Ron Clarke	David Smith
Keith Flunder	Simon Tagg
Bryan Jones	Bernard Williams
Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf	Susan Woodward

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

Apologies: Tina Clements, Julia Jessel and Candice Yeomans

PART ONE

1. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

2. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 4 April 2018

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 4 April 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

3. Improving Attendance and Participation in our Schools and Settings

Members were informed that Staffordshire continued to have below national average absence rates in its primary, secondary and special schools. Primary and secondary schools were 0.2% lower than the national average of 4.7%, and this was the fourth consecutive year in which the County had maintained lower than the national average absence rates. Special schools had achieved 1.8% below the national average for their overall absence rates. It was acknowledged that there had been an increase in Staffordshire's absence figures, however this was within the context of a national rise in student absence figures.

It was a cause for concern that Staffordshire Pupil Referral Unit schools (PRUs) were 13.5% above the national average for overall absence, however there were some signs of improvement with a narrowing of the gap between the national and Staffordshire figures for persistent absences. The local authority was working with the PRU headteachers to explore ways to improve attendance, and an independent review had been commissioned of the entire PRU estate.

In relation to permanent exclusion from schools, unvalidated data for the current academic year was indicating a notable reduction in the year on year increase

previously experienced. This was not solely due to a reduction in permanent exclusions, but a significant increase in permanent exclusions being rescinded. This was often achieved through the work of the District Inclusion Officers who now sat within the local authority and who liaised between the school, parents and a potential alternative education provider or school, to agree a managed move or package of support which meant the child could continue in their education without the period of disruption usually caused by a permanent exclusion.

Work around children missing education continued to perform a vital task of identifying children in Staffordshire who were without education, and then ensuring that they were provided with an opportunity to receive education. In the current academic year 729 cases had been processed, with a positive outcome rate of 97.5%. This work had begun to embed itself, with high numbers of schools responding to a regular census. This reported on students who were on a reduced timetable and therefore were categorised as children missing out on education, and those that had a plan in place and were expected to return to full-time education. Work had also now begun to develop a data platform to capture this information, which would create live reports on these children, enhancing the ability to identify promptly and where necessary to challenge any cases of concern.

In relation to PRUs a member queried whether they had governing bodies, and asked what was being done to engage with them. It was confirmed that regular meetings were held between them and the local authority. Members were informed that the Alternative Provision Panel were mindful that children were going into PRUs and staying too long, when they needed to be progressed back into mainstream education as quickly as possible, and consequently greater pressure was being put on them to achieve this. A member queried whether there were performance management measures in place around this, and potential negative outcomes such as an impact on funding or the threat of closure. It was confirmed that measures had been introduced this year to hold them to account, around a graded approach and targets to discourage them from keeping children there too long and focus on short, intensive interventions. The Cabinet Member for Learning and Employability pointed out that schools had to be willing to take these children in. A member queried if schools were able to refuse, and was informed that a school could be made to take a pupil after a first permanent exclusion, but not after a second.

Members were reminded that the School Forum had agreed to reduce the funding for Education Welfare Services by £757K, delegating this sum back to individual maintained schools. This had meant that all schools/academies in Staffordshire were now responsible for providing early intervention and prevention for unauthorised absence, with the local authority now focusing on its role of providing statutory intervention when requested. A member commented that managed transfers created a confused picture around accountability. They were informed that now that schools were accountable for taking action around unauthorised absence, the local authority makes effort to hold them to account and take action if necessary.

A member suggested that, given the significantly better performance of PRUs elsewhere in the Country, it may be helpful to look into their arrangements and practices. Members were informed that it was important to change the culture around PRUs to encourage them to recognise their role as being one of a quick turn around, and that attitudes

towards more challenging children needed to be changed. The direction of travel was towards more accountability.

A member queried what activities were taking place to engage with local members and recruit them as school governors, and if any work was being done with members to encourage them to hold schools to account. The Cabinet Member for Learning and Employability informed the Committee that he wanted to see more proactive marketing in relation to member engagement. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People agreed that local members had a significant role to play. He suggested that an annual visit should be made to each school, and asked if it would be helpful to provide a series of questions for members to use.

In relation to children missing out on education, a member questioned whether the fact that 31 school had not responded to the survey would skew the figures. Members were informed that as the local authority did not run the schools it was not able to compel schools to provide the data.

A member commented that the statistics on exclusions did not show trends in the type of establishments, and questioned whether schools were adopting more of a zero tolerance approach towards challenging children. The Committee were informed that different schools took different approaches in relation to their Behaviour Policies. It was suggested that it would be helpful for schools to have a level playing field, and agreed that more guidance could be provided to them around this issue.

RESOLVED – That the comments and feedback from the Select Committee be used to shape future developments in work around improving attendance and participation in Staffordshire schools and settings.

4. Staffordshire's Libraries Strategy

The Committee considered a summary of the outcome of the Public Consultation that took place between 8 January and 1 April 2018, which would inform the Strategy for Staffordshire Libraries offer 2018/21. The report also expanded on the proposed Strategy for Staffordshire's Libraries offer 2018/21 which was previously considered by the Committee in September 2017.

Within Staffordshire the Library Service contributed to delivering health and wellbeing, digital inclusion, literacy, life skills and social cohesion outcomes. It was essential that as a Libraries Strategy was implemented for the future that the authority continued to work with internal and external partners to ensure that the library service remained relevant and continued to be sustainable. As part of the County Council's statutory network there were currently 43 Libraries, 2 Mobile Libraries and a Travelling Library.

Members considered details of the numbers of people engaging with the Library Service, and of how library use in Staffordshire had changed between 2014/18, together with a comparison with national trends.

Members were informed that 3,666 individuals, organisations and stakeholders had shared their views as part of the consultation. Their responses had delivered meaningful insight into preference and impact and provided robust representation of

some of those individuals most affected by the proposals. A full analysis and report of the consultation had been undertaken by the Council's Customer Insight Team to ensure independence. Members considered a detailed analysis of the public consultation outcomes, around Self Service Proposals, Community Managed Library Proposals, and the Mobile and Travelling Library Service. Having analysed the results of the consultation, it was proposed that self-service was piloted at Stafford Library and Penkrige (if this library does not transfer to community management). It was not envisaged that either of these libraries would be fully self-service and the proposed number of hours that each library could be staffed would be based on an analysis of use. The pilot would be monitored over a 12 month period and then evaluated.

With regard to Community Managed, it was proposed that the four least busy County Council Managed and Delivered libraries be transferred. These libraries were identified as Cheadle, Clayton, Eccleshall and Penkrige. This was met with a high level of disagreement during the public consultation however to enable these four libraries to remain part of Staffordshire's statutory network and deliver an MTFS saving it was proposed that Cheadle, Clayton, Eccleshall and Penkrige are offered for Community Management.

In relation to the Mobile and Travelling Library Service, the public had been consulted on a set of principles which would inform the future planning of mobile routes. It was therefore proposed to apply the principles that had been consulted on to inform the review. This would mean that routes would be re-drawn, the larger Travelling Library vehicle would be withdrawn at the end of March 2019, and the service would be delivered via the two smaller mobile libraries which were more flexible and therefore able to access more isolated or rural communities from April 2019.

A member asked how young people under 16 could access self-service libraries, as they were not able to access the library unaccompanied during self-service hours. The intention was that they would be accompanied by an adult or use the library during the core staffed hours. Self-service registration was in addition to library membership and applicants would undergo an induction process which would involve signing an acceptable use policy. Where this system was operating elsewhere it had proved to be self-policing.

A member queried whether there had been engagement with local members over the proposals, given their local knowledge and expertise, and it was confirmed that this was the case, along with a number of local groups. Questions were also raised around recruiting volunteers and in particular promoting and championing lead volunteers. Members were informed that work had been done with Rotarian groups, Community Partnership Officers and Community Support Officers around volunteering, and there had been a very low drop off rate. It was encouraging that volunteers were able to benefit from learning and development opportunities. Members shared examples of successful Community Managed Libraries in their areas, and agreed that these could be used as models for the future.

The Chairman questioned whether the Cabinet Member for Communities and officers were satisfied with the quantity and quality of the responses to the consultation. The Cabinet Member confirmed that it had met expectations. The Chairman referred to an emailed letter which he had received from the Friends of Penkrige Library, which had

been critical of the consultation process, alleging that it had been poorly advertised, there had been poor engagement, poor access and it had been difficult to respond to. He felt that, despite the late receipt and volume of information supplied, it was right to raise some of the concerns around the consultation, and questioned whether there had been weaknesses in the process. The Cabinet Member responded that it had been advertised in advance and that she had met with this group, who had also had meetings with the lead Library Service officers. Members were informed that a petition was currently being circulated in respect of Kidsgrove Library. However, there had been some misunderstanding, as no changes were proposed for this library. A response had been sent to the petition organiser which hopefully would resolve any confusion.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) The consultation response to the self-service proposal be noted and the introduction of a self-service pilot with Staffordshire be endorsed;
- b) It be agreed that the evaluation and selection process to procure Community Managed Library organisations was still valid;
- c) The existing support package and service specification for Community Managed Libraries be endorsed; and
- d) The application of the principles that had been consulted on to inform the Mobile and Travelling Library Service review be endorsed.

5. Update on the Final Report and Recommendations of the Working Together to Address the Impact of HGVs/HCVs on Roads in Staffordshire - Briefing Note

The Committee received a briefing note on the action plan and implementation of the recommendations of the Working Together to Address the Impact of Heavy Goods Vehicles/HCVs on Roads in Staffordshire final report.

Members were informed that since 2016 resources had been allocated to progress further work focusing on the A515 through Staffordshire, updating the Staffordshire Freight Strategy, engaging with local communities and businesses, and lobbying Members of Parliament regarding the county's HGV concerns. Members considered these areas in more detail, and commented that they were pleased to see the recommendations were moving forward. They also commented that the issue was about the whole of the County, not just the A515.

RESOLVED – That the briefing note be received.

6. Public Rights of Way Review - Briefing Note

The Committee received a briefing note on the key outputs of the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) Review, the bulk of which had been completed in April 2018.

Members noted that Staffordshire had one of the longest PRoW networks, spanning 4,510kms. The Review commenced in August 2016 and sought to: manage the demand placed upon it from users and landowners; reduce operating costs to meet the service's MTFs commitment, £290K by 20/21; and introduce more affordable ways of making a positive difference to Staffordshire's residents, landowners and visitors. They were informed of a range of outputs which had arisen from the nine work-streams within the Review, intended to provide the best solution to deliver in the safest way within the

resources available. A member commented that this was a pragmatic way forward, but emphasised the importance of complaints being dealt with in a timely manner. Members welcomed the fact that some progress was being made, but agreed that they wished to scrutinise the issue of the backlog with section 53 applications at their next meeting in July.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the briefing note be noted and that the backlog with section 53 applications be scrutinised at the Select Committee meeting on 19 July.

7. Work Programme

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

RESOLVED – That the Work Programme be noted.

8. Exclusion of the Public

RESOLVED - That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business which involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) indicated below.

9. Midlands Connect Proposal to become a Sub-National Transport Body - Consultation

(Exemption Paragraph 3)

Chairman