

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

Present: Ian Parry (Chairman)

**Attendance**

Ron Clarke  
Keith Flunder  
Bryan Jones

Kyle Robinson  
David Smith  
Bernard Williams

**Also in attendance:** Mark Deaville, Helen Fisher and Mark Winnington

**Apologies:** Tina Clements, Julia Jessel, Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf and Simon Tagg

**PART ONE**

**19. Declarations of Interest**

There were none at this meeting.

**20. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 19 July 2018**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 19 July 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

**21. Infrastructure+ Improvement Plan Progress Review**

The Select Committee received an update on the progress of the previously agreed Infrastructure+ Action Plan and on the progress of the extra £5m in-year (2018/19) investment in highway maintenance.

The Infrastructure+ contract had commenced on 1 October 2014. During the summer of 2015 a working group of the Select Committee had scrutinised the governance and reporting arrangements and in April 2016 had agreed an Action Plan of improvement with the then Cabinet Member for Economy, Environment and Transport. Members considered a third annual update on progress. The nature of the Infrastructure+ Strategic Partnership was that it was readily able to adapt to the Council's changing needs. This flexibility was being demonstrated by delivering at short notice the four year commitment of reinvesting £5m per year in highway maintenance.

The core element of the contract was the maintenance, management and improvement of over 6,300 Kms of highway network. Best use of resources was achieved by adopting preventative maintenance strategies and targeting resources as set out in the Council's Cabinet approved Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan (HIAMP). However, working within the limits of the available funding meant that achieving locally

desirable service levels was not always possible. This elevated the need for effective local engagement, timely communication and availability of clear information.

Members were informed that the recommendations of the Select Committee formed part of the Action Plan for the Customer and Communication Outcome Group that sat within the governance structure of the Infrastructure+ Contract. This group was now chaired by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, and wider membership was currently being reviewed. The Group had developed and launched a Highways Portal within the Members' Intranet pages on 1 November 2016. This had recently been upgraded with additional information and relaunched at a members' event held on 31 July 2018. Members received a short demonstration of the Portal and the information it provided, based on the format of "Frequently Asked Questions", which had received positive feedback from members. The purpose of the Portal was to assist members to respond directly to the many local highway enquiries which they received. Feedback from members would be integrated into the design and ongoing development of the Portal, which addressed a number of the Select Committee's recommendations. Improvements were also being made to streamline the defect reporting and customer feedback processes.

Members welcomed the fact that the membership of the Outcome Group was being opened up. A member commented that it was difficult to track issues which were raised via the myStaffs app as it could be hard to identify them in the absence of a map or location details in the response. It was acknowledged that further improvements to the defect reporting system could be made and this would be considered by the Outcome Group. In response to a question about Japanese Knotweed members were informed that there was a lot of information available on the Portal.

In relation to the recommendation that Community Highways Infrastructure Managers be asked to share details of meetings arranged with Parish Councils with the local member, concern was raised that this was not happening consistently, which was a cause of frustration for members. Similarly, although a request had been made to Staffordshire Borough and District Council planning officers that they publish highways (planning) responses that could pertain to housing developments as part of their Planning Committee minutes concern was expressed that this was not being done. It was agreed that it would be helpful to provide continuous reminders around these recommendations.

A member informed the Select Committee that they sat on the Outcomes Group, and welcomed representation from every district/borough. They felt that there would be a benefit to an Inspector attending the meetings to provide a holistic view from a frontline staff member, and it was agreed that consideration would be given to this proposal.

Members agreed that it was helpful to have factual information around gully cleansing and surface dressing, and queried how frequently this information would be updated. It was acknowledged that these programmes were often subject to change consequently were provided with appropriate caveats. In relation to the Portal the point was made that the "acid test" would be how well members used it to interface with members of the public and parish councils. It provided a lot of rich information which could help members to report on what has been achieved by the Council.

Members then received a presentation on the extra £5m investment in highway maintenance during 2018/19. The priority in year 1 had been to reduce the number of long-standing low-risk carriageway and footway pothole repairs to a more proportionate level, enable faster response times to new low-risk customer reported pothole defects and embrace a right-first-time and single visit approach wherever possible. Continued investment in subsequent years would aim to retain the improved level of service, whilst also providing added durability to reduce the number of pothole defects from occurring in the first place.

The extra £5m investment strategy for 2018/19 was made up of three core elements:

- £2.5m was being spent on a range of additional pothole repair teams, which would take the total pothole patching to over 130,000m<sup>2</sup> and equated to around 30,000 individual pothole repairs;
- £2m to enhance the annual surface dressing programme, ensuring that over 300 miles of Staffordshire's road network received timely and highly cost-effective pothole prevention treatment; and
- £0.5m drainage improvements, targeted to locations causing repeat surface defects.

So far during 2018/19 over 60,000m<sup>2</sup> of patching work had been completed bringing the net position of identified pothole defects at the end of July down to around 9,000. It was projected that by the end of the year the position would be close to a much more manageable range of 7,000 – 8,000. Notwithstanding the risks of a further difficult winter during 2018/19, and until such time as the much needed capital investment was made available, at this level it was hoped that a good balance could be achieved between the public's expectation of the speed of repair and operational efficiency.

The £2m additional investment for preventative surface treatments had supplemented the standard annual programme and would result in an additional 100 km of road network being protected against deterioration and the formation of potholes. The additional investment of £0.5m towards drainage improvements had significantly increased the resource available to carry out repairs on highway drainage infrastructure. This work was ongoing with the resource targeted at locations where defective surface water drainage systems had led to road deterioration.

Sample survey customer contact had started to show improvement in satisfaction with speed of response, scale of repair and quality of the work done. There had also been a sharp decrease in media enquiries and associated largely negative coverage since the extra programme of investment. This had been complemented by a decline in comments on social media. In conclusion, members were informed that continued development of the Highways Portal and customer feedback processes met the recommendations within the agreed Infrastructure+ Action Plan. The second year of reinvestment in road maintenance was having a positive effect in terms of reducing the number of long-standing, low risk carriageway and footway pothole repairs to a more proportionate level, enabling faster response times to new low risk customer reported potholes, and embracing a right-first-time and single visit approach wherever possible.

A member queried what the focus of the £5m funding had been. The Cabinet Member responded that in the past emergencies and category one and two potholes had been dealt with, but that there had been under investment in category three repairs.

Consequently the focus had shifted from reactive to proactive activity, for example investment in gully cleansing and repairs, which contributed to category 3 potholes. In taking a longer term view of the asset resources were being invested in preventative work.

A member expressed concern in relation to the maintenance of footpaths and claims against the Council for injury, and commented that they would like to see more of a focus on this area as prevention was better than cure.

Members agreed that it was important to view the extra funding as additionality and not back filling and that they and the public would be able to see this. Members queried whether the Council joined up with utility companies in order to get work done more efficiently and officers confirmed that this was done, and work was also done jointly with District and Borough Councils.

**RESOLVED** – That:

- a) The progress of the previously agreed Infrastructure+ Action Plan be noted; and
- b) The progress of the extra £5m in-year investment in highway maintenance be noted.

## **22. Delivering Housing in Staffordshire**

Members considered the proposed progression of two connected pieces of work to contribute towards the delivery of the Strategic Plan. These were:

- a) The preparation of a Strategic Infrastructure Plan (SIP) to support the construction of homes and creating new jobs by assessing the cumulative impact of growth across Staffordshire and considering infrastructure requirements to support that growth. This plan would aim to ensure new developments were supported by the appropriate infrastructure including roads, schools, employment opportunities, high quality transport, green spaces and excellent digital connections such as superfast broadband. The plan would also identify any new proposals as to how that could be funded and delivered.
- b) A detailed feasibility study to be undertaken to understand the most appropriate way to develop appropriate housing, to enable the County Council to actively engage in the housing market, providing a leadership approach that would expedite the delivery of appropriate new homes across the County in a planned and sustainable fashion.

Members were informed that the objectives of this work were to deliver a robust strategy and “ask” of developers and funders to support infrastructure delivery. It was also to facilitate, enable and deliver planned housing growth in the numbers and tenure of new homes, so that the County had a range of accommodation that people could afford to buy or rent. A further objective was to generate a potential revenue income stream to support essential County Council services into the future, in the face of significant financial challenges. This would require an acceptance of financial and procedural parameters to established ways of working which some may find challenging.

Members received a presentation on delivering housing in Staffordshire, and the Cabinet Member for Commercial drew their attention to the pledge set out in this, to

“Deliver value for money for residents and businesses and live within our means”. It was widely accepted that nationally the current housing market systems were not delivering the numbers, type or tenure mix of homes to support growth in tandem with the needs and demands of people. Not enough new homes, or the right variety of homes were being built; prices were continuing to rise faster than incomes and it was becoming increasingly difficult for young people to buy a home of their own. For Staffordshire, this meant that the County was potentially not meeting indigenous growth demands. As a result of this the County may be unable to retain skilled workers, including graduates, which would affect the County’s ambition of having a balanced economy and one of the strongest performing shire economies. It was therefore essential to have a sound and solid strategy and a robust and sustainable business case, in order to ensure that the right type, number and location of housing was delivered.

Members queried what the unique problems were in Staffordshire. The Cabinet Member for Economic Growth responded that the County was in the middle of three big conurbations, and faced the likelihood of overspill demand. The implications of this would be unplanned growth, increased pressure on existing facilities and housing developments that would not represent the right mix of homes for Staffordshire people. A member commented that it was essential to ensure that appropriate infrastructure was in place, and an opportunity to address issues in existing communities. They further commented that there should not just be a push for executive housing and queried whether work was being undertaken with social housing providers and whether the public were being consulted around the needs of communities. The Cabinet Member for Commercial agreed that infrastructure was a major issue, and also that a full dialogue would take place with local residents, planning authorities and partners. He also acknowledged that the involvement of local members was crucial, and that it would be important to establish good communications in order to bring town and district deals together so that their plans and the County’s plan dovetailed. The County’s policy was around enhanced two-tier working and establishing arrangements for working together.

A member questioned whether there was sufficient knowledge around the issue of housing. They commented that the market was 800,000 people and where they wanted to live and in what sort of housing. It was a complex and delicate marketplace, the demands of central government were “patchwork” and there were wide variations around the County. There was not much which was easily quantifiable and consequently they questioned if it was possible to profile demand for housing. The Cabinet Member for Commercial acknowledged that it did pose a complex and significant challenge. There was a need to be ambitious, and there would be a feasibility plan and strategic analysis of the market. It would also be important to have detailed conversations with all the relevant partners, such as residential planners and developers.

Members requested that they be involved in consultation on the strategy going forward and asked for a further update in six months’ time.

**RESOLVED** – That a further update on delivering housing in Staffordshire be brought to the Select Committee in March 2019.

### **23. Work Programme**

The Select Committee received a copy of their Work Programme for 2018/19. They were informed that an update on The Freight Strategy was to be considered at their meeting on 15 November and an item on The Safer Roads Partnership was to be added to the meeting on 14 December.

**RESOLVED** – That the above additions to the Work Programme be agreed.

### **24. Exempt Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 19 July 2018**

**RESOLVED** – That the exempt minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 19 July 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

**Chairman**