

Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 20 June 2019

Present: Ian Parry (Chairman)

Attendance

Tina Clements (Vice-Chairman)	Kyle Robinson
Mike Deakin	David Smith
Keith Flunder	Simon Tagg
Syed Hussain	Bernard Williams
Julia Jessel	

Also in attendance: Helen Fisher

Apologies: Ian Lawson, Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf and Jessica Shulman

PART ONE

56. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

57. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 25 April 2019

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 25 April 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

58. Staffordshire Air Quality Projects

Members were informed that Air Quality Management activities in Staffordshire had been taking place for several years, but recently there had been an increased focus by central government on the potential harm caused by air borne pollution, particularly from motorised traffic. It was felt that it was therefore timely for the Committee to review current activities and be made aware of the developing agenda. Members were asked to contribute to the debate and suggest where the authority's limited resources should be focused on in the future. They were informed that the authority's current Climate Change Strategy "Green Shoots" would be refreshed over the next twelve months and would be expanded to take greater account of the wider sustainability agenda, including Clean Air. This strategy would be brought back to the Committee prior to being signed off.

In considering details of Air Quality Management Areas a member commented that they would like to see the Two Gates traffic lights area in Tamworth included, where the air quality has been monitored over a number of years. Whilst it has been judged within legal limits there was a high level of cases of asthma, and it was on the walking route of

four main schools. It was suggested that a major contribution to the problem was parents driving their children to school, and that a possible solution would be to introduce no go zone around schools and encourage children to walk. A member commented that the structure for overseeing air quality management seemed rather bureaucratic and expressed concern that a lot of time can be spent talking about issues but not actually getting to grips with them. They queried whether there were any examples of how the process and the groups involved had delivered a success in reducing pollution. Members were informed that the Staffordshire Air Quality Forum was made up of representatives of the District and Borough Councils and the County Council. The activity that was delivered through the County Council had been mainly around infrastructure projects: changes to junctions; improvements to signals; new cycle routes. The direct impact of these schemes on air quality had not been measured to date. However originally there had been fifteen Air Quality Management Areas and now there were twelve. A member commented that there was lots of data, analysis and monitoring and questioned where the evidence was that the strategy was working. Concern was expressed that investment was being made in addressing air quality and the success and outcomes of this was not being measured. There were only so many interventions which could be made and it was important to identify those which were effective. Members were informed that the effectiveness of schemes was measured, around congestion, travel times and the value to businesses. Aside from highways and infrastructure projects, since 2011 behavioural change campaigns had been delivered, around trying to change how people travel, particularly around schools. In Tamworth a 17% modal shift had been achieved in getting parents and children out of cars and using alternatives.

In wide-ranging discussion members raised a number of local issues and expressed concern over delays in addressing pollution hotspots. It was suggested that the Environmental Protection Management Board could provide information on the success of schemes.

A member queried whether there were any long-term plans for urban tree plantations. Members were informed that the County Council had worked for a number of years with District and Borough Councils on tree planting. Members were informed that DEFRA had just produced a Clean Air Strategy, which wasn't just about transport but also agriculture, industry and heating in homes.

Members discussed the importance of a county-wide planning strategy and agreed that as a highways authority there were things that could be influenced now, for example the narrowing of roads in housing developments. They also considered the role of central government in providing incentives or imposing restrictions to address the issue of air quality.

A member commented that there was not much mention of public transport, and that the bus service was in decline in North Staffordshire where it was reduced and unreliable, which was resulting in people using cars. There needed to be a county wide discussion with providers on public transport and how it all inter-connects and interlinks, with areas working together.

It was queried whether the County could take the lead on electric charging points being installed in every new property. In relation to Travel Plans, which were an integral part

of planning approvals, concern was expressed that these often don't come to fruition. This issue needed to be examined to establish a process over which the County Council would have a greater degree of control and be able to extract contributions from developers.

Members were informed that in respect of the Air Aware Campaign, if everyone does a little it would make a huge difference. In relation to electric vehicles, the Cabinet Member expressed the view that the more that could be done to make it easier for people to use these the better. However, the batteries needed to be improved and the vehicles needed to be readily available.

The Committee were informed that the County Council had been successful in putting in a joint bid with Stoke on Trent City Council and borough and District councils in Staffordshire for monies from the government's Clean Air Fund.

With regard to the North Staffordshire Ministerial Directive a member commented that the County Council had a key role in finding a Highways and Transport solution to this and requested that the matter be reported back to a future meeting of the Committee. Newcastle Borough Council were opposed to a charging Clean Air Zone.

In relation to electric vehicles, members were informed that a feasibility study had been commissioned into when and if the County Council and Districts should be involved. The initial feasibility benchmarking study overwhelmingly indicated that Staffordshire was in the same situation as all of its neighbours, that electric vehicle take-up was fairly low, but it had more charging points than other areas. It also showed that because of the high disposable income in Staffordshire that people potentially could afford them. Whether the County Council should be involved in the market or not was yet to be decided. A lot of local intelligence had been gathered and this would be used to decide what the policy and the strategy would be. There was an issue over power and charging points at each new property, through the Section 106 discussions with developers it had emerged that the national grid could not support this. A further issue was that electric vehicles were not being manufactured quickly enough.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) The Air Quality Management Areas in Staffordshire that are managed and monitored by the Borough and District Councils and the County Council be noted;
- b) The progress being made with the current Air Quality Project that is funded by DEFRA be noted; and
- c) The Air Quality Ministerial Directive that has been served on Newcastle Borough Council and Stoke on Trent City Council in relation to a number of roads in North Staffordshire be noted and that a further report be brought to a future meeting of the Select Committee.

59. Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Policy and Strategy

The Chairman welcomed Richard Harris and David Ogden from Amey, who had been invited to attend the meeting to assist members in their consideration of this item.

Members were informed that Staffordshire County Council was responsible for a highway asset valued at over £7.5 billion providing benefit to all as stakeholders. The highway network was the largest and most visible asset for which the County Council was responsible. The way it was managed and maintained had a direct impact on the County Councils' ability to deliver the vision of 'a connected Staffordshire, where everyone has opportunity to prosper, be healthy and happy'. In recent years the investment in highway infrastructure and its performance had been increasingly under the spotlight. The current financial challenges and increased public demands and expectations have meant the management of our highway assets has never been more important to ensure we achieve our outcomes.

The Committee were informed that the Highway Asset Management Strategy and Highway Asset Management Policy will ensure that the Council as Highway Authority continues to meet its statutory duties under the Highways Act 1980. They took into account the ongoing financial pressures on the Authority, supporting delivery of the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy and also the opportunities for the Council to take advantage of additional funding available from the Department for Transport. Members were invited to consider and comment on the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy and Strategy; and the comments of the Select Committee would be reported to the Cabinet at the August 2019 meeting for them to take into account in their consideration of this matter.

Members acknowledged that there was a challenge between the interests of road users and communities and the ability of the County Council to allocate its funding to deliver a decent asset to provide customer satisfaction. Whilst there had been an improvement in response to repairs, there was still some level of concern over this. A member pointed out that all councillors had been allocated £20,000 to address defects and road infrastructure issues, but that it was an issue of capacity. Problems which had been reported last year were only now being addressed and it was queried how capacity would be managed. The Cabinet Member responded that the report provided a detailed background to the situation which the County Council was in. £75m was required now to bring the asset up to standard and £42m would be required every year to maintain it in a steady state. There was not sufficient funding, and the approach taken to repairs was first and foremost to maintain the safety of roads. The purpose of the £20,000 was to enable members to address problems that were really important in their local area. It was acknowledged that there had been improvement and progress and this deserved praise. Whilst recognising that there always had been and always would be a gap between funding needed and funding available a member questioned how this and the issue of capacity would be managed. Officers from Amey informed members that a key element was forward planning and the benefit to them of being given foresight of a programme of work. They suggested that it would be helpful if members could work together to maximise their £20,000 allocations, for example in co-ordinating gully

emptying work to make it economically viable. It was acknowledged that resources were stretched.

A member queried what was being done to lobby the government for funding and what support would be given through HS2. The Committee were informed that officers and the Leader of the Council had been involved in lobbying. In relation to HS2, the priority had been to keep lorries on the main A road network and an agreement was in place around repairs to lower category roads.

A member commented on the decline in customer satisfaction and expressed the view that it was important to temper publicity around the additional funding given to members in order to manage expectations. They also expressed concern over communications with Amey.

It was acknowledged that these were difficult financial circumstances and that the Strategy adopted a pragmatic approach. Officers were urged to take every opportunity to seek government funding for larger structural issues. A member raised the issue of road signs being one of the County's assets and expressed the view that it was important that these were well maintained. They also questioned the increase in claims for personal injury and damage, in particular how much was paid in compensation and how much did insurance premiums cost. Members were informed that damage only claims were generally less than £1,000, but that claims for personal injury were often much higher.

Members expressed concern over work undertaken by utility companies, in that temporary traffic lights often appeared to be used unnecessarily and left in place for long periods of time causing congestion and that work by different companies was not co-ordinated. Officers agreed that this was a challenge, but informed members that the planned introduction of a permit scheme would give more control. Officers from Amey confirmed that risk assessments were done in each case and that the safety of staff was the prime concern. In response to a question about the number of Inspectors in the County, officers confirmed that there were 24 in total, six network, five reactive and the remainder safety Inspectors. Members also queried the variation in response times to issues raised.

The Chairman thanked the officers from Amey and suggested that it would be helpful for them to be invited to attend future meetings from time to time.

RESOLVED That:

- a) The comments of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee on the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy and Strategy for Staffordshire which has been developed to fit within the context of the national code of practice for highways, Well Managed Highway Infrastructure and the available budget be reported to the August meeting of the Cabinet; and
- b) Additional information on personal injury claims and updated information on average response time from enquiry to inspection be provided to the Committee.

60. Infrastructure+ and Lighting for Staffordshire Performance Review

The Committee considered details of operational performance on two long-term highway service delivery contracts, Infrastructure+ and the Streetlighting Private Finance Initiative. Infrastructure+ was an overarching agreement between the County Council and Amey, providing an outcome focused approach to the delivery of highway and non-property infrastructure services across Staffordshire. In May 2003 Lighting for Staffordshire Ltd commenced delivery of the street lighting Private Finance Initiative contract, which would operate for a period of 25 years. The appointed service provider tasked with works delivery was E.on Energy Solutions Ltd, which was the majority shareholder of Lighting for Staffordshire Ltd. The value of the contract at its commencement was £250m and the Council received a Revenue Support Grant of £1.54m per annum to support delivery of the contract.

Members received details of Infrastructure+ Outcomes 2018-21, an Infrastructure+ Performance Management Roadmap, an Infrastructure+ Performance Report from February 2019, a Lighting for Staffordshire Progress Report, and a Lighting for Staffordshire Annual Service Report 2017-18.

A member asked if the reporting system could be modified to accommodate the reporting of more than one pothole when they were in close proximity to one another. They also expressed concern over the quality of repairs made by utility companies and asked if there was any recourse on this. Officers responded that utility companies were required to comply with the New Roads and Streetworks Act (NRSWA) specification requirements for highways reinstatements. Members urged officers to ensure that the contract with Amey was managed effectively and that the service and response times that were agreed in the contract were met.

Members were informed of the timetable of the streetlighting PFI asset replacement programme. Since 2012/13 13,500 LED lights had also been installed across the County in an Invest to Save Programme. In response to a question about switching street lights out from midnight, particularly in rural areas, officers informed members that the LED technology already provided dimming and that local communities were able to request switch-off. However, the savings would be negligible given the reduction in energy charges for that period.

RESOLVED – That the update of contract performance for the Infrastructure+ Partnership and the Lighting for Staffordshire Private Finance Initiative be noted.

61. Work Programme Planning

Members considered outstanding items from the closing work programme for 2018/19 to decide what work needed to be carried forward onto the new work programme and were invited to suggest any new items.

The Committee suggested that a Working Group be set up to consider some of the environmental issues raised earlier in the meeting. It was agreed that a discussion should be held with Philip Atkins, Mark Winnington and Conor Wileman prior to scoping this. It was also proposed that the item on community transport should be broadened to

include some of the issues regarding public transport and the supported bus network. Members were also informed that the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee had requested that they consider the capacity of Pupil Referral Units to cope with increasing numbers of referrals.

RESOLVED – That the Work Programme be agreed, subject to the inclusion of an item on the capacity of Pupil Referral Units to cope with increasing numbers of referrals and scoping for a Working Group on environmental issues.

Chairman

