

**Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 17
January 2020**

Present: Ian Parry (Chairman)

Attendance

Tina Clements (Vice-Chairman)	Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf
Keith Flunder	Kyle Robinson
Syed Hussain	David Smith
Julia Jessel	Simon Tagg
Ian Lawson	Bernard Williams

Also in attendance: Jonathan Price, Philip White and Mark Winnington

Apologies: Helen Fisher and Gill Heath

PART ONE

72. Declarations of Interest

Julia Jessel declared an interest in Minute 79, in her capacity as Chairman of the Countryside and Rights of Way Panel.

73. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 3 October 2019

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 3 October 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

74. Alternative Education Provision

The Committee considered a detailed overview of alternative education provision commissioned for Staffordshire's vulnerable learners. This included details on: funding; permanent exclusions; pupil referral units/short stay schools; enhanced mainstream schools; the alternative provision dynamic purchasing system; the alternative provision panel; and education other than at school. From January 2019 the Local Authority had established a weekly meeting of representatives across the Vulnerable Learning Service called the Alternative Provision Panel (APP). Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) headteachers attend on a rotational basis and there was an open invitation to representatives from schools and academies. The purpose of the APP was to provide a level of scrutiny and problem solving to the allocation and ongoing provision for young people who have either been permanently excluded or required alternative education provision commissioned by the Local Authority. The APP also considered Fair Access Protocol cases and monitored and reviewed the Protocol. The APP also ensures that appropriate checks were in place to evidence the young people were properly safeguarded and reviewed.

In wide-ranging discussion members expressed concern that young people were spending extended periods of time in PRUs when these should be a short-term, temporary measure with children being encouraged back into mainstream education or other appropriate provision. It was acknowledged that this was an issue and work was being done to address this.

A member questioned whether Inclusion was better than Exclusion. The response was that in most cases it was. Early identification of special educational needs and appropriate intervention was key. Efforts were being made to build in a more graduated response into the system. Members commented that some schools were better at managing exclusions than others and that it could be suggested that some schools were less tolerant because they were guarding their reputations. They were informed that it would be important to tackle individual schools' behaviour policy and change the culture in mainstream schools.

Members also questioned whether using the funding for innovative alternative options had been investigated, for example closing the PRUs and using it to support mainstream schools. They were informed that there were 402 schools in Staffordshire and if the resource was spread in this way there would not be a sufficient level of expertise to deploy. Officers pointed out that this approach had been taken in Nottingham, and the levels of permanent exclusions were now growing. Concern was expressed in relation to those cases where parents had been coerced into withdrawing children from school and home educating them. Whilst many parents did an excellent job there were questions around some parents' ability to provide a good education and the potential for abuse or neglect. Members were informed that previously there had been one member of staff responsible for the EHE community but that two additional members of staff had now been recruited. If there was any evidence of coercive behaviour in a school this would be referred to Ofsted, whose framework was less results driven with more focus on inclusion. A member referred to the poor performance identified in two of the PRUs and questioned what was being done to ensure that a quality service was being delivered. Members were reassured that one of these was now under new management and the other had issues with the building which was going to be replaced. A member commented that to achieve cultural change in a school it was important to engage school governors, who now had a raised awareness of the practice of off rolling which helped them when sitting on an exclusion panel considering the decision of a headteacher. They asked if there was a way of involving school Governors more, perhaps by investing in training, to assist them when they were setting up policies within their schools. The Cabinet Member responded that the role of governors and governance were areas that he was interested in developing further. A key role of the governing body was to provide constructive challenge and it would be helpful if governors knew what questions to ask when considering exclusions, and work would be undertaken on this suggestion.

A member queried whether there was an independent appeals process in place for permanent exclusions. It was confirmed that this was the case, although in the last academic year only four parents had taken that option. It was questioned whether children were being subject to inequalities and it was reiterated that work was being undertaken to encourage consistent behaviour policies across schools and to share good practice around governance.

In relation to primary aged children it was queried whether enough was being done in addressing complex needs with early intervention, before the transition to secondary school. It was acknowledged that some children's needs were not identified early enough, resulting in behavioural issues which could lead to permanent exclusion. A lot of this work was tied in with the SEND agenda because many of these children would have unidentified special educational needs. Identifying those children's needs as early as possible and addressing them as soon as possible was key. A member questioned what tools or resources were provided to primary schools to support them in this work. They were informed that ten years ago District Inclusion Partnerships had been set up in secondary schools which were very effective, and two years ago their membership had been widened to include primary schools. This brought schools together and provided an opportunity to share information about children and the strategies they had used and provided peer support and this partnership working had proved very effective in primary schools. Some high needs block funding had been provided to the partnerships to enable them to be innovative, often having a mentor to work across the primary schools in their district, purchase a counsellor to work with a child or some therapeutic support. Training had been provided by Entrust on dealing with an aggressive child and they were also undertaking behaviour audits with a number of schools this term. SENCO network events were also being run, there was evidence of good practice in the transitioning of children from primary to secondary schools and special schools and PRUs were going into mainstream schools to offer services and support.

A member asked what the objectives were that the Cabinet Members and officers were working to. It was confirmed that the strategy had three stages to it, to stabilise the picture, effecting change and to see placements reduced and children being in the right place so that they can get the most out of their education and lead successful lives.

In conclusion, the Chairman commented that there were interesting developments but questioned if these were marginal efforts and if they were radical enough and asked if investigations had been made to identify good practice which could be embedded in Staffordshire. Also, should different models be explored. The Cabinet member thanked the Committee for their challenging questions and comments, particularly around governance. He hoped the message which members took from the meeting was one of aspiration that the children concerned would have better outcomes and better futures.

RESOLVED – That the overview of alternative education provision commissioned for Staffordshire's vulnerable learners be noted.

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

The committee considered details of the activity around the recently established Education and Skills Strategic Group and its agreed work programme. The Education and Skills Strategy: A Partnership Framework for Staffordshire was published in April 2019, with a clear vision: "That every Staffordshire child receives the best possible education and is equipped with the learning, skills, aspirations and opportunities they need to continue lifelong learning and forge a successful career, with fulfilled, healthy lives, as responsible adults".

The inaugural meeting of the Education and Skills Strategic Group was held on 20 June 2019, with a membership reflecting the range of educational partners and providers across Staffordshire and beyond. They considered presentations on the county council's new Raising Aspiration programme of research with Staffordshire University and on the Future Economy and Local Industrial Strategy. The group agreed to seven key priorities for its future work programme: Inclusion; Aspiration; Outcomes; Curriculum Offer; Best Practice; Emotional Wellbeing; and Capacity. At its second meeting on 2 October 2019 the group discussed Aspiration and the Local Industrial Strategy with Alun Rogers, interim LEP chair, and Best Practice with Bernie Pearce, Director of Blackfriars Teaching School. The group agreed that its work programme for the coming year would focus on Aspiration and Best Practice:

- Aspiration - To convene a workshop to identify how all education providers should use the information and intelligence of the Local Industrial Strategy and also to identify and share existing good practice. The longer-term aim was to define a broad "Staffordshire Curriculum" which reflects the values and skills aspirations for the county.
- Best Practice – To convene a workshop to identify sources of best practice, but with an emphasis on the development of personal characteristics. The longer-term aim for this priority was to define a broad "Staffordshire Curriculum" which reflects the values and skills aspirations for the county.

In addition, the group agreed to adopt the "Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education" of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership, contained in the Final Report of the Ethical Leadership Commission in January 2019. They also agreed to establish a task and finish group to develop proposals for the first "Staffordshire Education and Skills Conference" in Summer 2020, to draw together the diverse range of providers and partners to showcase good practice and the work of the strategic group.

The Chairman expressed concern that there had been an expectation that the strategic group would take a strong role in school improvement and hold people to account – schools, governing bodies, headteachers – for under-achievement and performance and this did not seem to be the case. The Cabinet member pointed out that it was important to recognise that the education system was incredibly diverse and involved a lot of stakeholders and centres of power and decision-making and the purpose of this exercise was to draw them together and give them a sense of shared purpose and shared responsibility so that they can be held to account and the system can hold itself to account. It was therefore important to bond that group together. A member commented that what was needed was sector improvement through self-help, but also direct accountability for outcomes. The parent governor representative expressed the view that the strategic group provided a useful opportunity to network and have influence on schools through the workshops.

A member queried how businesses were engaging with the strategy and was informed that the link to these would be through the LEP. It was agreed that lifelong learning and upskilling was very important, not just in relation to jobs but also on a personal wellbeing level, and that members could be ambassadors for this and raising aspirations. A member asked about satisfaction levels with sixth forms, in particular careers advice and guidance but also standards of teaching. They were informed that there was a big

disparity in terms of outcomes in the county. The challenge was that most of the high schools were academies and it was therefore difficult to exert influence. Larger sixth forms tended to do better as they were able to offer a broader range of curriculum choice. The LEP is the vehicle for careers advice, together with the Local Industrial Strategy around education and skills.

RESOLVED – That the committee note the activity of the recently-established Education and Skills Strategic Group and its agreed work programme and emphasise the need for the group to bring about improvement, with demonstrable outcomes.

76. Staffordshire Library Service 2020-2025

Members considered a draft report and presentation on the Staffordshire Library Service 2020-2025 which was to be taken to Cabinet on 19 February 2020, which outlined the range of activity which took place across Staffordshire Libraries and the value that this activity delivered within communities. Cabinet would also be asked to endorse and agree the reviewed support package for the community managed library model which would enable the sustainability of Community Managed Libraries and support their work within communities. Cabinet would also be asked to agree the key milestones and overall timescale.

It was acknowledged that the transformation of the Library Service had been well managed, and Staffordshire had a Community Managed Library Network and support offer that was nationally recognised as best practice. To ensure the continued success of Staffordshire County Council's community managed library model, ongoing support and investment was essential. Members acknowledged that there was a risk that Community Libraries might fail if the level of support was reduced. Concern was expressed over volunteers being asked to do more in relation to cleaning and grounds maintenance and that this could lead to a reduction in volunteers' goodwill. Members were informed that discussions had begun with community managed organisations on the Cabinet report and were assured that it was not the intention to put an onerous burden on the volunteers.

The committee recognised that there was a high level of satisfaction with the library service, and members referred to a number of examples of successful libraries in their local areas which had expanded the service offer and asked if these were typical. They were informed that all of the Community Managed Libraries had worked hard at providing an offer that was appropriate to their community setting, combined with a statutory duty to provide "a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons". For example some of the libraries focused on employment and training, others had focused more on activities for children and young people. There was a great variety of offer and none of them were exactly the same. A member commented that it would be important to ensure that the service was sustained and improved in the future.

The committee acknowledged the wonderful contribution made by local volunteers and commented that it was very important to provide support and training for them. They were informed that there was a very good training package and every effort was made to ensure that the volunteers at the Community Managed Libraries did not fall behind the County Council managed libraries. When the new IT was being rolled out the volunteers had a training package which was akin to the County Council's workforce.

The committee thanked both the officers and volunteers for their hard work and resilience.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) The draft recommendations to Cabinet contained within the Staffordshire Library Service 2020-2025 report be noted;
- b) The range of activity which takes place across Staffordshire Libraries and the value that this activity delivers within communities be noted; and
- c) The comments of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee on the overall direction of travel for the Library Service and the proposed support package for the community managed library model which will enable the sustainability of the community managed libraries and support their work within communities be fed back to the Cabinet at their meeting on 19 February 2020.

77. Work Programme

In considering their Work Programme, members were informed that an update on the Delivery of Housing in Staffordshire would now be brought for consideration to their November meeting, instead of February, as officers were waiting for government policy guidance and information on funding. A meeting of the SEND Working Group was to be held on 23 January. They were informed that the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Opposition Vice-Chairman had met with officers the previous week to undertake a scoping exercise for the Inquiry Day on Community Transport, to be held in April.

RESOLVED – That the Work Programme be noted.

78. 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 Schedule 12A (as amended) of the Local Government Act 1972 indicated below.

79. Update on Section 53 Applications

(Exemption paragraph 5)

Chairman