

# **Minutes of the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 29 November 2021**

Present: Tina Clements (Chairman)

## **Attendance**

Keith Flunder (Vice-Chairman (Overview))	David Smith
Philip Hudson	Ross Ward (Vice-Chairman (Scrutiny))
Graham Hutton	Bernard Williams

**Apologies:** Philippa Haden, Syed Hussain, Ian Lawson, Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf and Jessica Shulman

## **PART ONE**

### **22. Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

### **23. Minutes of meeting held on 16 September 2021**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

### **24. Flood Risk Management Report 2021**

The Committee considered a report of the Cabinet Member for Environment Infrastructure and Climate Change informing them of the proposed process and timescales for refreshing the Authority's Flood Risk Management (FRM) Strategy together with the County Council's FRM Team's workplan priorities for 2021/22 (schedule 1 to the signed minutes).

The County Council were designated Lead Local Flood Authority for Staffordshire under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. As such the Authority had various responsibilities associated with floods and water including the development of a Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and monitoring progress and activity by all parties involved in flood risk management. Their current FRM Strategy had been prepared in December 2015 and was due to be updated in 2020. However, following a delay in publication of the Government's National Strategy this had been postponed until 2022.

However, Members noted that work had already commenced on the Strategy refresh and it was expected that external consultants would be appointed in early 2022 to assist in this process. In addition, key Stakeholder involvement was planned for Spring 2022 with a draft revised Strategy being submitted to Cabinet for approval during Autumn 2022 with final publication expected in Winter 2022.

Members heard that the FRM Team worked to fulfil the County Council's statutory duty under the Act by investigating incidences of flooding where either:- (i) five or more residential properties in one location had flooded; (ii) two or more commercial properties in one location had flooded or; (iii) one or more critical infrastructure in one location had flooded. Accordingly following floods which had met the above-mentioned criteria, 15 reports were due to be published before the end of 2021/22.

Since Autumn 2019 the Team's' priorities had changed in response to:- (i) an increased demand for flood investigations; (ii) the Covid-19 pandemic and; (iii) to take account of the various lessons learned over the previous flooding period. Their focus was now entirely on ensuring the Authority's statutory duties were being met and Members also noted the specific priorities set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

In response to a letter dated 18 May 2021 from Mr. S. Perren, Chairman of the Eccleshall Flood Action Group (EFAG) to the County Councillor for Stone Rural County Electoral Division (the previous Chairman of the Committee) regarding flooding in Eccleshall and suggested remedial actions (attached at Appendix 1 to the signed minutes), the Committee were addressed and given a PowerPoint presentation by Mrs. S. Bramall of EFAG (slides attached at Appendix 2 to the signed minutes) highlighting the Group's concerns. The Committee were interested to learn something of the detrimental impact flooding had on local communities in Staffordshire as a whole so that they could better hold the Cabinet Member to account and ensure that the County Council's duties and responsibilities were being met.

During the full and wide ranging discussion which ensued, Members gave detailed scrutiny to the Strategy and Team's priorities etc, asking questions and seeking clarification on various matters, where necessary, including:- (i) the responsibilities of adjacent land-owners in maintaining drainage on their property and the enforcement powers of the County Council; (ii) the importance of effective partnership working with Stakeholders such as the Environment Agency and Water Companies; (iii) the need for effective communication between the County Council and local communities impacted by flooding; (iv) the efforts being made to improve data collection and sharing by the County Council with stakeholders; (v) the role of early warning systems in helping to mitigate damage to property; (vi) progress by the County Council in implementing

their Highways gully emptying programme and measures to improve its effectiveness in the future and; (vii) the use of 'greywater' systems in helping to reduce incidence of flooding.

The Chairman then thanked Mrs. Bramall for her interesting and informative presentation which had helped the Committee understand the various issues involved.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the report be received and noted.

(b) That the concerns of Eccleshall Flood Action Group regarding flooding in Staffordshire, be noted.

(c) That the County Council's Flood Risk Management Team's priorities for 2021/22 be supported.

(e) That the proposed process and timescales for the Flood Risk Management Strategy refresh be supported.

(f) That progress against the County Council's proposed Outcome Measures for the 2021/27 Flood Risk Management Strategy be brought to the Committee for scrutiny in six-months' time.

## **25. Infrastructure+ and Lighting for Staffordshire Performance Review**

The Committee considered a report of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport updating them on the operation of the County Council's Infrastructure+ (highway and non-property infrastructure services) and Lighting Contracts (schedule 2 to the signed minutes).

Infrastructure+ had gone live on 1 October 2014 since which time it had:- (i) delivered in excess of £300m highway maintenance operations and projects; (ii) achieved over £30m front-line service cost savings and; (iii) implemented in excess of £100m of Highway and transport infrastructure improvements.

A total of 905 Staffordshire households had responded to the 2021 National highways and Transport (NHT) survey, an analysis of the responses received had indicated they placed most importance on 'Safety on Roads' and 'Condition of Roads' and least importance on 'Demand Responsive Transport and 'Local Taxi or Minicab Services'. In addition, the public were most satisfied with 'street lighting' and least satisfied with 'Condition of Roads'.

Members noted that Staffordshire's overall theme scores in the 2021 NHT survey had generally declined when compared to those in 2020.

Respondents' considered that there were more potholes and damaged roads and the Authority were doing less to repair local highway infrastructure. However, a transformation programme comprising three elements ((i) Design of Future Service Deliver Model; (ii) Changing Arrangements Now, ready for the Future and; (iii) A new Investment Strategy) was currently being developed which would ensure better performance in the future. Specifically, the Programme aimed to:- (i) put communities and customers at the heart of service delivery; (ii) provide greater control and flexibility of resources; (iii) launch a new enhanced communities offer and; (iv) focus on quality, improving assets and demonstrating value for money.

With regard to lighting, Lighting for Staffordshire Limited had commenced their delivery of the street lighting Private Finance Initiative Contract in May 2003. Since this time the quantity of street lighting assets in the County had increased from 99,343 to 108,406 in 2021 (ie 9.1%). Members noted that contract performance took account of both the Asset Renewal Programme and general maintenance operations.

Members noted that the total number of assets renewed in the current five-year block period (2018-2023) was 7,160 against a target of 9,170. In addition, the number of assets renewed in the two previous blocks had exceeded their respective targets. During 2021, the total number of faults (including emergency faults) had reduced by approximately 50% when compared to 2003. Also, the number of lights lit remained consistently high at 99.3% compared to a target of 98%. According to the NHT survey, Staffordshire's customer satisfaction was 98%.

During the full and wide-ranging discussion which ensued, Members gave detailed scrutiny to the performance data set out in the report and appendices, asking questions and seeking clarification on various matters, where necessary, including:- (i) the significant reductions in carbon dioxide emissions achieved by the lighting renewal programme; (ii) the reliability of new equipment (lights and columns) installed; (iii) the standards required of new developments in respect of highway infrastructure prior to adoption by the County Council; (iv) and the arrangements for reporting defects by members of the public and County Councillors.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the report be received and noted.

(b) That the performance achieved by the County Council's Infrastructure+ and lighting contracts, since their commencement, be noted and the efforts being made to improve customer satisfaction in the future be welcomed.

(c) That the feasibility of providing Members with additional information, via the County Council's electronic mapping system, on highway structures/assets within their Divisions, included in the above-mentioned lighting contract, be investigated.

(d) That on-going performance against the above-mentioned contracts be monitored closely.

(e) That further reports on the County Council's Highways Infrastructure Transformation Programme, in light of its revised priority status, be brought to future meetings for consideration/scrutiny, as required.

## **26. Bus Transport Inquiry Day (Friday 21 January 2022) Information Sharing Session**

The Committee received a briefing and PowerPoint presentation from the Director of Economy Infrastructure and Skills on the bus transport market in Staffordshire together with recent developments in national policy, relevant to their forthcoming Inquiry Day on 21 January 2022 (slides attached at Appendix 3 to the signed minutes).

## **27. Work Programme**

**RESOLVED** – That, with the addition of "Flood Risk Management Strategy 2021/27 Outcome Measures – Progress" (as set out in minute No. 24 above), the updated Work Programme (schedule 3 to the signed minutes) be approved.

## **28. Date of Next Meeting - Thursday 13 January 2022 at 2.00 pm, County Buildings, Stafford**

**RESOLVED** – That the date, time and venue of the next meeting be noted.

**Chairman**