

Minutes of the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 23 March 2022

Present: Tina Clements (Chairman)

Attendance

Keith Flunder (Vice-Chairman (Overview))
Syed Hussain

Graham Hutton
David Smith

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Philippa Haden, Philip Hudson, Ian Lawson, Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf, Jessica Shulman and Bernard Williams

PART ONE

45. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

46. Minutes of meeting held on 28 February 2022

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

47. County Economic Strategy

The Committee considered a report of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills seeking scrutiny of the draft Economic Strategy 2022-2030 following its approval for consultation by Cabinet at their meeting on 16 March 2022 (schedule 1 to the signed minutes)

The County Council's Economic Recovery, Renewal and Transformation Strategy was adopted in June 2020 in response to the challenges and opportunities arising from the Covid-19 Pandemic. However, since that time, Staffordshire's economic outlook had improved significantly which meant that a new Strategy was required, aligned to the priorities identified in both the refreshed Strategic Plan and emerging national policy.

The Primary focus of the draft revised Strategy (through the Strategic Plan) were:- (i) Town centres; (ii) Start-up and step-ups; (iii) Higher skilled and higher paid workforce; (iv) The development of investment

ready projects and; (v) Strategic corridors. In addition, various other priorities and themes were identified as being important in supporting the future growth of the economy. These included:- (i) Innovation; (ii) Supporting businesses on their journey to net zero and; (iii) Maximising the use of investment to unlock external funding.

Achieving the vision and ambitions set out in the Strategy required delivery of the various projects and programmes set out in existing and future supporting Delivery Plans. It was recognised that the level of resources needed to complete some of these projects were beyond those currently available to the Council. Therefore, the Authority intended to lead on direct delivery, collaborate on joint delivery and advocate for the delivery of projects and programmes which met shared objectives, where necessary.

During the full and wide-ranging discussion which ensued, Members gave detailed scrutiny to the draft revised Strategy, asking questions, seeking clarification and raising issues of concern as necessary, including:- (i) the arrangements for monitoring progress towards achieving ambitions which they said should be appropriate and timely; (ii) the level of flexibility required to take account of rapidly changing circumstances eg rising costs/inflation and in the labour market etc; (iii) the need to have careful regard to the importance of digital infrastructure, new technologies and the 'green' Agenda; (iv) the support required by the voluntary sector going forward building on the excellent work which it had achieved during recent months; (v) the role of County Councillors in communicating the Authority's vision and monitoring outcomes and; (vi) support for small and medium sized enterprises having regard to their major role in the Staffordshire economy.

In response, the Cabinet Member acknowledged the various points which had been made, highlighting the relevant paragraphs in the draft Strategy, where necessary. However, he undertook to ensure their comments were adequately reflected in the final version and looked forward to working with them in monitoring progress against detailed Delivery Plan targets.

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

(b) That the Economic Strategy 2022-2030 be supported and the above-mentioned points/areas of concern be incorporated into the final document and Delivery Plans, where appropriate.

(c) That an update on progress against the various ambitions set out in the Strategy and targets in the Delivery Plan be brought to the Committee at three monthly intervals.

48. Variation of Order of Business

RESOLVED – That the order of business on the Agenda be varied and that item No. 6, 'Work Programme' be now taken.

49. Work Programme

RESOLVED – That the updated Work Programme (schedule 3 to the signed minutes) be approved.

50. Staffordshire Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) - 2020/21 Annual Report

The Committee considered a report of the Chairman of Staffordshire Standing Advisory County on Religious Education (SACRE) regarding their 2020/21 Annual Report which covered their work during the period September 2020 to September 2021 (schedule 2 to the signed minutes).

SACRE was a statutory Committee of the County Council whose role was to inform and advise the Authority on all matters relating to religious education and collective worship in Staffordshire's 'Maintained' schools. Whilst the Scrutiny Committee had a limited role in scrutinising the work of SACRE, the County Council commissioned support for them from Entrust. Therefore, Members were interested to learn whether these arrangements had operated satisfactorily and if not, to hold the Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND) to account as, necessary.

The meeting was attended by Lauren Nicholson-Ward, the Vice-Chairman of SACRE.

Members noted that the support commissioned by the County Council through Entrust had included clerking, venue hosting and advisory services (as supplied by a part-time Advisor in Religious Education post for up to twelve days work per year). In addition, the Advisor also provided in-service training courses to teachers whose schools had bought into this enhanced service.

During the discussion which ensued, they were pleased to note that the support given to SACRE compared well with that of other areas in the Country (as set out in the Annual Report) and that the Advisory Council had no concerns regarding their operation during the year.

The Chairman then thanked Mrs. Nicholson-Ward for her attendance and undertook to raise any further questions regarding the work of the Advisory Council with Reverend Metcalf at the appropriate time.

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

(b) That any further questions or observations on the work of Staffordshire Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education be raised with Reverend Michael Metcalf, at the appropriate time.

51. Date of Next Meeting - Thursday 14 April 2022 at 10.00 am, County Buildings, Stafford

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

Chairman