

Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 20 November 2013

Present: Brian Edwards (Chairman)

George Adamson
Ann Beech
Maureen Compton
Mark Deaville
Rachel Kidd-Smithers
Geoff Martin

Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf
Geoff Morrison
Martyn Tittley (Vice-Chairman)
Diane Todd
Ellen Wright

Also in attendance: Philip Atkins and Mark Winnington

Apologies: Len Bloomer and Neil Taylor

PART ONE

20. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

21. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 17 October 2013

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee meeting held on 17 October 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

22. Overview and progress updated for the Strategic Economic Plan and EU Structural and Investment Fund Strategy

At their meeting of 17 October 2013 the Select Committee had received a broad contextual overview and progress update on the emerging economic strategies being developed to secure economic growth in Staffordshire. Members now considered two of these, the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and the EU Structural and Investment Fund Strategy (ESIFS), which were being developed through the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SSLEP).

In the June 2013 Spending Review, the Chancellor confirmed the creation of the Local Growth Fund (LGF) of £2 billion pounds between 2015/16 and 2020/21. To access this each LEP must create a SEP, the strength of which would determine their allocation of the LGF. Rather than the SEP bidding for funding from the LGF it was expected that LEPs would use their SEP to outline barriers to and opportunities for economic growth within their area, showing how the LEP, local partner organisations and businesses would work to address these issues.

The Select Committee were reminded of the announcement from the Secretary of State, Innovation and Skills in June 2013, of nominal allocations of European funds to each

LEP. LEPs were tasked with producing an ESIFS to outline how the next round of EU funding would be used and Members received the draft copy of the SSLEP's ESIFS.

The SEP and the ESIFS were being produced in tandem to ensure close alignment. The intention was for the ESIFS to fund delivery of some of the interventions within the SEP. Rather than the SEP specifically targeting funding within the LGF a holistic approach was being taken of all the economic opportunities and barriers that exist within Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.

The Select Committee received details of the key dates for the development of both the SEP and the ESIF. They received a copy of the draft submission to Government of the ESIFS.

Members considered the six overall growth priorities that had been identified for the SEP, these being:

- Sectors and inward investment
- Business growth and innovation
- Sites and infrastructure
- Housing and place
- Strategic finance and funding
- Skills

Members asked for an example of where EU funding had been used successfully within Staffordshire. One of Staffordshire's flagship examples of this was the Lymedale Business Park, Newcastle under Lyme, which had been developed using EU Regional Development funding. The Select Committee enquired if this development had resulted in the up-skilling of the local workforce. After the collapse of the mining industry it had been a brave decision to acquire these sites and bring them back in to productive use. There had been success in attracting different businesses onto these sites.

The Council Leader informed Members of how EU funding had changed over a number of years and of the necessity to recognise and plan for the match funding elements within any allocation. Staffordshire was a skills pilot authority, working with colleges to ensure that Staffordshire young people have the right skills for the local economy.

Previous European funding had been allocated based on population. EU funding now represented four to five times the amount previously available.

Members asked what new sectors were being generated through the LEP. Staffordshire already had strengths in a number of sectors such as ceramics, advanced manufacturing, including companies such as JLR and JCB, and the LEP supported these industries in further development. EU funding also supported small and medium enterprises.

The Select Committee noted the importance of tourism to Staffordshire and were surprised that Cannock Chase was not included in the visitors report. They also sought clarification over which universities were involved with the Education Trust, querying whether Keele was linked into the Trust. Members felt that the Education Trust was an excellent way of linking the employers with local universities/colleges and pupils to ensure Staffordshire young people have the right skills for the local economy.

Members also queried what development would be undertaken at Chasewater, suggesting this was a significant tourism development opportunity.

Members raised concerns over the split LEP membership of some District and Borough Councils within Staffordshire and the funding consequences of this. Cannock Chase and Lichfield District Councils were members of both the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LEP and the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP (GBSLEP). The East Staffordshire and Tamworth Borough Councils considered themselves to be only in the GBSLEP. As a result of this a number of funding streams from Central Government had been split across LEPs with the Staffordshire based GBSLEP funding not always ring-fenced for use within Staffordshire. There was a great deal of extra work and bureaucracy involved in allocation of funding streams between the split LEPs where the priorities of the different LEPs were not the same. Where ever possible priority synergies were identified, with work involving the split funding undertaken within these areas.

At the 17 October Select Committee members asked for a rationale as to why Districts should be members of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LEP. This work was underway and would be shared with members shortly.

RESOLVED – That the Select Committees comments on the two key strategies being developed through the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership to secure economic growth and prosperity in Staffordshire, the SEP and the ESIFS, be noted.

23. Work Programme

Members received an updated copy of their work programme. The following developments had been made:

- the pupil attainment item would now be considered at the January meeting
- the agenda for 19 December meeting was lengthy and would be split to enable the education items to be considered first. A working lunch would be provided at this meeting
- members had now been sent a number of briefing papers, with a substantive report requested for the following: Chasewater Country Park and the roll out of Broadband
- a request had been made to the Cabinet Member (Economy and Infrastructure) that a briefing on minor works on rural roads be circulated to all Members. [Note by Clerk: Mr Winnington has proposed delaying this whilst discussions are ongoing regarding the Infrastructure+ contract.]

RESOLVED – That the updates to the work programme be noted.

Chairman

Documents referred to in these minutes as Schedules are not appended, but will be attached to the signed copy of the Minutes of the meeting. Copies, or specific information contained in them, may be available on request.