

Local Members' Interest
N/A

## **Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee – 12 May 2014**

### **Achieving Excellence in Learning and Skills**

#### **Recommendation/s**

1. That the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee recognise the existing achievements of our education partners: staff, children, young people, parents and carers.
2. That Committee Members comment on and endorse the progress being made to bring about improvements in Learning and Skills in Staffordshire.

#### **Report of Anna Halliday, Commissioner for Education and Wellbeing**

##### **Summary**

##### **What is the Select Committee being asked to do and why?**

3. The Select Committee is being asked to recognise the existing strengths of the learning and skills system in Staffordshire, and comment on the progress already being made to bring about further improvements.
4. The comments of the Select Committee will be reported to the Cabinet at their meeting on 21 May 2014 for them to take into account in their consideration of the strategy.

##### **Report**

##### **Background**

5. A good education is one of the best investments that can be made in life. The people of Staffordshire expect access to good schools for themselves and their children and family members, and Staffordshire's businesses cannot grow and innovate without the talents of a highly skilled local workforce. Our nurseries, schools, colleges, universities and training providers are powerful assets, as they are influential in creating the right conditions that enable our communities to thrive, individuals to realise their potential, and society to continue to develop culturally, economically and socially.
6. The way that the county council has traditionally been involved in the delivery of learning and skills, and in delivering its school improvement function in particular, may have been effective in the past, but in the modern world and with a global economy it is no longer fit for purpose. Our robust self-assessment and analysis of outcomes (as reviewed by the Select Committee Working Group Sept 2013 –

January 2014) tells us that there are many areas of attainment and opportunity in which Staffordshire's performance is average at best – and this is not good enough.

7. At the same time, the world in which we operate has continued to change rapidly. The government's policy direction revolves around granting greater independence to schools, academies, and education providers. The time is right to take full advantage of this flexibility for the benefit of Staffordshire people. Advances in technology are also affecting the entire learning and skills system, and mean that people themselves are accessing learning in different ways and there is greater demand for a more diverse range of outcomes from education. Choice and control mean that people are much more empowered to take responsibility and drive accountability through consumer choice.
8. The time is right to drive a step-change in how we work and the outcomes that we achieve together. This is now ready to be taken forward, as "Achieving Excellence for Learning and Skills".

### **Recent Progress**

9. Staffordshire County Council and its partners have been working together to deliver a step-change in outcomes and performance in Learning and Skills. We have a positive record of success and have made significant progress over the last 12 months:
  - a. we have more schools graded as good or outstanding by Ofsted up from 65% in August 2012 to 74% in August 2013
  - b. we have around 7,200 more primary pupils and 2,500 more secondary pupils attending a good or better school in 2013 compared with the previous year
  - c. we have reduced by 21% the number of pupils attending schools graded as inadequate, which was down to 3% of pupils by August 2013
  - d. we have "core groups" established and operating to raise standards in every school where we have identified a cause for concern
  - e. we have secured a major investment into Skills through our City Deal, which includes a significant Skills programme to further strengthen apprenticeship participation and technical skill levels in advanced manufacturing and engineering
  - f. we have established a unique model of public-private sector partnership through our Education Trust which is operating to improve links between business and education locally including through curriculum innovation and careers advice and guidance
  - g. we have established an innovative joint venture partnership through Entrust, designed to deliver a one-stop-shop of services for schools
  - h. we have transformed our commissioning approach and operating model for school improvement to deliver more robust challenge, support and intervention so that schools improve
10. There are many and significant signs of progress in learning and skills. However, we know that we need to do more and to go further and faster if we are to achieve our bold ambitions for Staffordshire people. The strategy for Achieving Excellence in Learning and Skills sets out how we will achieve this.

## Principles – Straight A's for Staffordshire

11. Our new approach is one that puts Staffordshire people in greater control of where and how they learn, and makes the most of freedoms and flexibilities available to us through the current policy environment. It means a greater connection with the pathways into work and economic innovation to ensure that skills and learning in the workforce meet the needs of local businesses, and it takes full advantage of the independence of Staffordshire's schools and education institutions.
12. A good education should be one that encourages people to think for themselves and be able to respond to life situations. Clearly this is a far wider remit than simply being able to deliver under exam conditions. Our strategy for this area therefore needs to be radical, bold and ambitious, and delivered jointly with all partners around a single set of principles. These principles foster:
  - Aspiration – so that individuals, families and communities cultivate high aspirations and raise their expectations of what they can expect and what can be achieved;
  - Access – so that there is fair and equitable access to excellent provision through a vibrant, dynamic and diverse market of providers, with genuine choice and control for the customer
  - Ambition – so that providers are ambitious about what they offer and the standards they deliver and that parents or carers are persistently ambitious for their children and young people's futures;
  - Attainment – so that the learning and skills outputs in terms of results , exam scores, levels of attainment and progress will continue to improve and will match with the latent potential of each individual and each cohort of learners;
  - Achievement – so that successful outcomes are enabling people to achieve their personal goals, to progress well, into good jobs, well-equipped to thrive and prosper in adult life;
  - Attitude – so that the culture and behaviours we most value are intrinsic to our approach including: promoting personal and community responsibility, stimulating innovation and enterprise, valuing volunteering, making positive and informed lifestyle choices, being prepared to go the extra-mile, solve problems, and be resilient and tenacious in driving for excellence.
13. This will be a very different approach, and mean a role for the county council which is much more focused on strategic leadership to marshal and mobilise the contribution of diverse stakeholders and partners across the local system.
14. We will be the facilitators and enablers, working with partners and providers to develop the customer offer, and supporting Staffordshire residents to take advantage of it. This needs to be a whole system approach – with every part of the learning and skills system operating to drive and deliver excellence for Staffordshire people. This is about working together to capitalise on every asset in local communities, make good use of the, freedoms and flexibilities that we have at a local level to build on local strengths and jointly tackle any weaknesses.

## **Seven Pillars of the Strategy**

15. There are seven key components of the learning and skills system in Staffordshire, each of which is critical to delivering our aims. Achieving Excellence for Learning and Skills therefore details how each component will contribute to the overall success:
- **Effective System Leadership** – this promotes collaboration between partners, articulates the shared ambition, leads the strategy and implementation, drives the step-change, and champions the interests of all partners.
  - **Powerful Citizens as Customers** – residents who make informed choices will drive improvement through their raised expectations for quality and outcomes, will shape and influence through their demand, and will be active in contributing to successful outcomes.
  - **Influential Business Engagement** – partnership between the public and private sector lends the expertise and opportunities of both, informs the curriculum with skills priorities of local businesses, promotes pathways into good jobs and means investment in our people and places.
  - **Flexible Learning Infrastructure** – it is vital to ensure that education infrastructure (such as schools) contributes as an asset in each community, adapts and organises to meet those communities' changing needs, designs for access, inclusion, sustainability and efficiency, and embraces technology and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.
  - **Supportive Partnership and Policy Environment** – we must ensure that innovation and flexibility are allowed by the policy environment, supporting a proportionate approach and generating collaboration and trust.
  - **Excellent Schools and Settings** – greater autonomy amongst institutions will mean greater self-improvement and more engagement in collaborative networks made up of institutions themselves. They will be high-performing and maintain high aspirations.
  - **Effective Governance** – schools and institutions will be held to account through the use of robust intelligence, and a combination of a focus on the institution combined with activity to harness the wider expertise of others. Challenge and support and action in the best interests of the community in school governance will be essential to the success of Achieving Excellence for Learning and Skills.

## **What will be different?**

16. Setting out a clear ambition and a bold plan means that success will deliver real and radical sustainable change. By the end of 2016 we expect the differences to be tangible in:
- A very different role for the Local Authority in its Learning and Skills function. Having already moved away from directly delivering and providing services to schools – through the transfer of these to our Joint Venture Partnership, Entrust – the Local Authority will offer strategic and system-leadership for our area.
  - A different system of public accountability, with greater autonomy and therefore accountability held by each school, college or provider for the services they offer.
  - New and different structural and support networks of schools will be operating under a new national funding system.

- A different and more powerful role for children, young people and their parents or carers in the whole system and in the choices they make for themselves.
  - A fully transformed system for Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) will be operating to change the pattern of local provision.
  - A different approach to meeting the additional (but less complex) needs of our learners. More will be met through tailored and timely support within mainstream provision and resources.
  - An enhanced and increasingly different extended offer from schools and education settings, operating purposefully as community hubs and shared assets, accessible at different times and in different ways than in the past.
  - A different kind of local ownership and accountability will develop. New, more diverse and different measures of success will be applied in judging what a successful and effective education delivers.
  - A different and more actively connected education-business link that encourages local pathways into employment and improves the supply of the skills that businesses need.
  - An improved supply of relevant information, advice and guidance. Informed by business and local economic opportunity, and powerful in the hands of those that use it, the IAG offer will include more real-time and real-life experience of work through innovative public – private partnerships led by our Education Trust
  - A more powerful and influential voice for the people of Staffordshire and the community, including in governance and accountability mechanisms.
  - The role and function of governing bodies will be different, developing to function in an even more professionalised capacity across groups of schools.
17. All of these changes will combine to deliver a new and vibrant local offer of learning and skills that is judged externally as at least good, and increasingly as outstanding and it performs as “best in class.”
18. There will be a shared commitment to innovation, collaboration and a collective pride in the learning and skills offer in Staffordshire, based on a shared recognition of the passion, optimism and professionalism that drives all of our local partners and stakeholders.

### **Link to Strategic Plan**

19. Learning and skills are fundamental to the delivery of the county council’s strategic aims. In August 2013, Staffordshire County Council agreed three priority outcomes to build a better Staffordshire. These priorities are that the people of Staffordshire will:
- Be able to access more good jobs and feel the benefits of economic growth;
  - Be healthier and more independent;
  - Feel safer, happier and more supported in and by their community.
20. Learning and skills underpin each of these outcomes, whether that is in young people moving through school or adults being able to retrain and adapt to whatever changes they experience through life. There are key

health and wellbeing benefits to a strong learning and skills system, and vital links to the ways that communities develop and support one another.

### **Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity –**

21. At the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee meeting on the 19th December 2013, Members discussed:
  - Details of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Education Trust's terms of reference, governance structure, key task groups and business plan in bringing together all organisations that have an interest in education, training, skills and jobs.
22. At the meeting on 24th January 2014, Members discussed the report of the Working Group on the Ofsted Inspection of LA School Improvement Arrangements, at which all those who had been involved in this work were thanked, and the report and its recommendations were welcomed. Members were told that it was felt this work had helped to shape the documentation into something that was fit for purpose, and that the school improvement process was now clearer, with a good framework and robustness of intervention. At the same meeting, Members also discussed:
  - Pupil attainment in Staffordshire
  - Entrust, and the way that the significant changes within education, such as the move towards academies and schools exercising their autonomy in purchasing services, had prompted consideration of a new way to deliver services. There had been an emerging market in school service providers and Staffordshire had identified an opportunity to become part of a partnership that would bring both benefits of commercial expertise and to the wider organisation through joint ownership of a commercial offer.

### **Community Impact**

23. As the approval of this strategy by Cabinet does not constitute a key decision, a detailed CIA is not deemed to be required at this stage. However, in summary:
  - **Prosperity, knowledge, skills, aspirations** – positive impact through raised standards, attainment and better skills for life and work
  - **Living safely** – positive impact through informed decision making
  - **Supporting vulnerable people** – positive impact through an included focus on supporting those facing disadvantages which may impact on outcomes
  - **Highways and transport networks** – neutral, with some potential for change linked to travel-to-learn patterns and school transport
  - **Learning, education and culture** – positive, through the aim to improve outcomes in learning and skills for all Staffordshire residents
  - **Children and young people** – positive, through improving standards and outcomes in schools, colleges and other provision
  - **Citizens and decision making, improved community involvement** – positive, through: greater choice and control for Staffordshire residents; recognition of the

importance of schools as assets in their community; delivery of the strategy including through local governance

- **Physical environment including climate change** – neutral/positive, through well-managed and sustainable schools
- **Maximisation of use of community property portfolio** – positive, through the strategy embracing learning taking place in many varied settings and circumstances. Community venues feature in the commissioning of Adult and Community Learning which is embedded within the strategy

24. Impact on:

- **Age** – positive, through promotion of life-long learning opportunities, up-skilling and reskilling regardless of age
- **Disability** – positive, through provision for implementing the SEND reforms that will benefit those with complex needs and disabilities
- **Ethnicity** – positive, as monitoring of outcomes by all ethnic groups is a core feature of performance and standards in education and skills
- **Gender** – positive as above, as monitoring of outcomes by gender and tackling underachievement, particularly of boys, is a core feature of performance and standards in education and skills
- **Religion/belief** – neutral / positive, as school designation and diocesan links are a core feature of our diverse network of schools, promoting positive opportunities and influences in regard to religious belief
- **Sexuality** – neutral / positive through a promotion of choice, control and a drive for high standards for all learners irrespective of sexuality. A positive learning experience, with good governance and learner feedback should provide benefit.

25. Impact / Implications

- **Resource and value for money** – no direct resource implications, though opportunities to drive efficiency, effectiveness and value for money are intrinsic to the strategy
- **Risks identified and mitigation offered** – the benefits of the approach and the cost of failure are outlined in the body of the strategy. There are reputational risks associated with failure, and longer term risks for citizens and communities arising from failure to strengthen and reform learning and skills in Staffordshire
- **Legal imperative to change** – There are legal imperatives in regard to implementing statutory reforms, specifically SEND reform, and undertaking statutory duties including those for School Improvement. The strategy seeks to improve and enable the functioning of these duties.

### Contact Officer

Name and Job Title: Anna Halliday, Commissioner for Education and Wellbeing  
Telephone No: 01785 278774  
Address/e-mail: [anna.halliday@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:anna.halliday@staffordshire.gov.uk)

### Appendices/Background papers

Appendix 1: Achieving Excellence in Learning and Skills