

Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 24 July 2015

Present: Simon Tagg (Chairman)

Attendance

Len Bloomer	Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf
Tim Corbett	Paul Woodhead
David Loades (Vice-Chairman)	Candice Yeomans
Geoff Martin	

Also in attendance: Ben Adams and Gill Heath

Apologies: Maureen Compton, Carol Dean, Ian Hollinshead, Sheree People and Mike Worthington

PART ONE

7. Declarations of Interest

Mrs Gill Heath, Cabinet Support Member for Environment and Rural Issues, declared an interest in minute no. 11 as her brother-in-law owned one of the quarry sites.

8. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 1 June 2015

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee meeting held on 1 June 2015 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

9. Adult Community Learning Strategy and Quality Improvement

Staffordshire's Adult and Community Learning Service provided programmes of learning that contribute to better health and well-being, employability and social inclusion for nearly ten thousand adults each year. The service had responded to significant changes in funding policy and structures over the last three years, reducing the cost to the Local Authority (LA) and better targeting the funding contribution to those who would benefit most.

Adult Community Learning (ACL) received funding via an annual grant allocation from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), County Council core funds and investment from providers in activities as well as income from fees. In 2015 the commissioning framework was revised in consultation with localities, taking account of the priorities for community learning, and a district needs analysis for each of the eight localities. The percentage of learners from lower super output areas had increased overall from 12.3% in 2012-13 to 12.8% in 2013-14 against a Staffordshire average of 9.4%. This percentage was higher for learners on programmes which particularly targeted

disadvantaged communities. For example on Community Learning Trust Responsiveness Fund programmes where 15.3% of learners in 2012-13 and 24% in 2013-14 came from lower super output areas.

From 1 August 2015 priorities for Community Learning would be delivered through five main programmes:

- Leisure taster and courses
- Provision for adults with learning difficulties/disabilities (ALDD) and those with enduring mental ill health
- Wider family learning (WFL)
- Family English, maths and language (FEML)
- Employability skills and
- Functional skills.

The Select Committee asked how the needs of a community were identified in respect of commissioning priorities. Data giving the levels of deprivation and unemployment were used and this was matched with local intelligence from the Local Community Learning Trust, having local conversations about local needs. Commissioning was informed by this identified need, with incentivised payments based on delivering to target groups.

ACL also promoted initiative and examples were shared with Members where individuals previously involved in Community Learning had then gone on to develop and lead independent community learning programmes themselves. These were not always easy to track as they were not funded through the local authority.

Progression surveys were undertaken three months after an individual had completed a community learning course to help identify progression into further learning, employment and the impact personally of the learning activity. Nationally there was a lot of data supporting the positive impact of ACL, including with regard to tackling dementia.

Basing learning programmes within the community meant that both learners and providers were rooted in their community, overcoming previous difficulties in identifying learners. Family learning often took place in children's centres and schools, with children's centres able to collect useful data to help encourage participation of those with children under five.

Members commended the success of this service but asked how the quality of provision would be maintained within the continued funding challenges. The "Pound Plus" strategy contributed to the sustainability of provision. Pound Plus investment came through a combination of direct income (fees from learners, sponsorship, grants and tenders, sales from produce or services), cost savings (eg on accommodation, use of volunteers, shared back office services) and value for money (avoiding duplication, effectiveness of curriculum and setting up self-organised groups). In 2013-14 the Pound Plus investment from direct income was £368k with £840k in cost savings. Whilst no data was available on value for money savings it was anticipated that this accounted for £1.2m of investment which was equivalent to around 75% of the Community Learning Budget. Targeting the funding from the SFA and County Council was also extremely important to ensure its most effective use. Quality of provision remained key and Members heard

detail of the robust systems and protocols in place to quality assure the broad range of provision and providers.

Members shared an example of good practice at St Peters CofE Primary School, Hednesford, where adult learning courses were offered to support parents in understanding the way in which core curriculum subjects were taught and therefore help parents support their children's learning. Members asked if this was duplicated elsewhere and were informed that Family Learning Grants were offered to schools to support such work. Feedback from parents who had taken part in this type of learning was very positive.

Members were aware of the employability skills delivered through the Adult Community Learning and that generally these were to a level 2 basic employment level into lower skilled jobs. Members asked whether there would be a progression in provision to provide higher skilled courses. The Adult Community Learning offer was about engagement and learning, with a guidance element to the offer. Progression in this instance was in supporting learners into either Further Education courses through a range of different providers such as local colleges or supported into employment.

Members heard about a recent graduation ceremony for Staffordshire apprentices which celebrated their success. This was the first such ceremony in Staffordshire and marked the achievements of 150 apprentices in a range of Staffordshire businesses. The challenge was now to increase the number of apprenticeships in Staffordshire by a further 50% by 2020.

Members shared their experience of ACL, highlighting the positive impact of lifelong learning, developing a shared interest and helping combat social isolation. The Cabinet Member, Learning and Skills, reiterated that whilst supporting employability skills was important, equally important was learning for learning's sake which promoted wellbeing and had a value beyond getting the next job.

The Select Committee noted that data from adult learning inspections between 1 September 2014 and 17 June 2015 showed that 57% of providers received an overall effectiveness grade of good or better compared with 77% in 2013-14. The thresholds around inspection were more challenging and the need to continue to work with providers to ensure quality had been identified, looking at the key issues highlighted within the inspection reports. A range of measures were in place to ensure quality of provision. A readiness group had been set up to prepare for an ACL service inspection, with the new inspection regime implemented from September 2015.

The welcome reduction in unemployment also resulted in a reduction in the number of unemployed adults available for referral by Job Centre staff to adult learning programmes. Consequently there had been a significant under-utilisation of SFA allocations leading to a reduction in earnings for 2014-15. A rebasing of future income had therefore been undertaken which may see Staffordshire's budget contract. In addition there was a national reduction by the SFA of 24% in all adult skills budget allocations for 2015-16. This would result in a step change over the next 12 months in developing a skills plan, steering more funding to address identified skills gaps.

Members received details of the SAR strengths and areas for improvement around community learning, adult skills budget and apprenticeships and suggested that these targets could be developed further to give smarter clearer targets.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) the Adult and Community Learning contribution towards reducing unemployment be commended;
- b) the SAR strengths and areas for improvement targets be developed into smarter targets that can be more easily monitored and evaluated;
- c) a further report be brought to the 4 March Select Committee highlighting how effective governance and scrutiny with the cycle of Self-Assessment and Quality Improvement will be more closely aligned.

10. Staffordshire Learning Infrastructure Framework

The draft Staffordshire Learning Infrastructure Framework (SLIF) sets out the proposed purpose, principles and approach to achieving first class education and childcare places based upon taking a longer-term and more joined up approach to the planning of infrastructure. Professional engagement on the draft Framework and associated documentation started in June and views are sought by 3 August 2015.

The County Council has a statutory responsibility to ensure that every child in the county has access to a childcare place, a place at school or an offer of suitable post-16 education or training when they needed one. As a result of the rising birth rate in Staffordshire and the scale of housing development within the County, it was anticipated that there would be a need to invest around £330m in an additional 13,000 primary and 8,000 secondary mainstream school places by 2031.

It was important to link the SLIF with locality plans as they developed to ensure school place provision. Cross border provision was more difficult to estimate, but it was anticipated that extra school places would result from cross border growth around Greater Birmingham and Cheshire East.

Members stressed the need for partnership working with district and borough councils to avoid difficulties and ensure sufficient provision for school places in Local Plans. The work between Stafford Borough Council and the County was given as an example of good practice in partnership working around local plan and school place provision.

It was noted that the County Council had formally objected to Planning Inspectors that insufficient provision had been made for school sites in East Staffordshire Borough Council's Local Plan. It was hoped that the SLIF would help to avoid such difficulties in the future as it clearly showed the growth in provision needed within each district.

In particular Members wished to see full consideration of school place planning as a standard for all housing planning applications. Officers from the County Council sent responses to district officers in respect of each planning application and its school place implications, however the detailed response was not always shared with district planning committees. Select Committee Members felt it was important to continue to raise the profile of school place planning with their colleagues in district and borough councils. They were aware of the challenges of securing sufficient developer contributions

towards the provision of school places and the pressure from developers. It was imperative that the consequences of not having enough school provision be understood.

Members raised a specific example of a housing development in Stafford and the timing of the creation of a new school. The detail of this specific example would be checked after the meeting. It was noted there was a balance to the timing of any new school build to ensure pupils weren't drawn from outside the area of development and being aware of the possible de-stabilising effect of any new school.

Members congratulated the Cabinet Member and his officers on the SLIF, which was the platform to allow those more challenging conversations around provision to be held. They also congratulated officers on two new primary schools built in Burton that had been commended for their design.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) the approach set out in the draft Staffordshire Learning Infrastructure Framework be endorsed;
- b) clarification over the details of the new school build in Stafford be forwarded to the member concerned;
- c) Borough and District Councils be encouraged to have an education lead at all their Planning Committees who can be fully briefed on the education provision implications of all planning applications.

11. The New Minerals Local Plan for Staffordshire

At their meeting of 24 April 2014 the Select Committee had received details on the preparation of the new Minerals Local Plan for Staffordshire, informing them on the consultation relating to the first draft of the new Plan. The Select Committee had established a working group to produce a response to the consultation process. Members received details of how the Plan had developed as a result of the consultation. The final draft plan was available to view via the Council's online consultation portal, with the six week consultation ending on 31 July 2015.

The Plan had been considered in detail by the Planning Committee at their 4 June meeting. The Plan had not changed significantly from the first draft. Six key policies were outlined within the Plan to assist in any planning decision.

Once the consultation had concluded the Plan would be considered at full council prior to its submission to the Secretary of State and subsequent examination by the Planning Inspector.

Members reiterated the importance of this document in helping to determine any future planning permissions around mineral extraction within the County. The impetus was for extended use of existing quarries or use of previously moth balled quarries rather than opening new sites. The Plan also helped ensure liaison committees would work around quarry sites to help address any issues within the local communities.

Members expressed their thanks to Matt Griffin, Team Leader, Minerals Planning Policy, and his team for the work they had undertaken producing this plan.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) The final draft of the Minerals Local Plan be endorsed; and
- b) Members congratulate the officers who have produced this plan.

12. Work Programme

The Scrutiny and Support manager reported that the Infrastructure+ Working Group had held its first meeting, with a further meeting planned for 29 July. The Group were working to ensure the right information was available to enable effective scrutiny by the Select Committee.

At their 1 June meeting the Select Committee had agreed to undertake a working group following a petition to full Council in May highlighting concerns over Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV) on the A515. Scoping was being undertaken for this work and it was expected that the work would be undertaken through two inquiry days in September. Members debated whether this piece of work should be broadened to consider the issue county wide rather than a focus on the A515, with concerns that addressing an issue in one specific area could simply transfer the problem to another community if a broader approach was not taken. After some discussion members agreed this work should take a county wide approach, with a specific response to the petitioners once this work was finished. Membership of this group had previously been agreed as:

- Len Bloomer
- Tim Corbett
- David Loades
- Geoff Martin
- Martyn Tittley

The Vice Chairman updated Members on the work of the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Services Working Group. This Group had met twice and would be meeting again in September. They were taking part in public engagement sessions around the adult mental health and emotional wellbeing strategy led by Healthwatch. The work was likely to take longer than first anticipated and Members would be kept informed of progress.

The Scrutiny and Support Manager reported that visits to the Countryside Estates had now been set up during August. The East Staffordshire Estate visit was scheduled for 26 August with the North Staffordshire visit on 24 August. The visits would help inform scrutiny of the Countryside Estate Review which would take place at the September scrutiny meeting. Members were asked to contact the Scrutiny and Support Manager with their visit preference.

Members were reminded that if they wished to raise items for inclusion on the work programme, or if they had any training or developmental needs, they should contact either the Chairman or Scrutiny and Support Manager.

Members raised the Parking Strategy as an item to be included on the work programme for future scrutiny.

Members earlier decision to bring a further ACL report to their 4 March meeting will also be added to the work programme.

RESOLVED – That the amendments listed above be made to the work programme.

Chairman