

Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 15 December 2016

Present: Simon Tagg (Chairman)

Attendance

Ann Beech	Geoff Martin
David Brookes (Vice-Chairman)	Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf
Ian Hollinshead	Sheree People
Kevin Jackson	Paul Woodhead
Mike Lawrence	Mike Worthington

Also in attendance: Ben Adams, Mark Deaville, Gill Heath and Mark Winnington

Apologies: Len Bloomer and Candice Yeomans

PART ONE

25. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

26. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 15 November 2016

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 15 November 2016 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

27. Petition re: Arts and Community Services at the Shire Hall, Stafford

Members heard evidence from the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities in response to a petition with 3,068 signatures (and 115 from people living outside of Staffordshire) requesting that Arts and Community Services were kept at the Shire Hall, Stafford. Lisa Henderson, the petition organiser, attended to present the petitioners' case. Specifically the petition stated: "The Shire Hall is a central location in Stafford that enables the community to engage in the arts. If it is shut we will lose a valuable space that provides a range of services for the local community and supports many vulnerable people. Among many other services the building is home to:

- an exhibition space for contemporary art;
- a craft shop that supports British craft makers;
- a multi-sensory room used by families with young children and people with disabilities;
- a calm environment that is utilised by mental health support groups;
- the historical courtroom and holding cell both of which have been used for film and television work on major networks; and

- artist led workshops.

We would like the review of the use of the Shire Hall building to keep the services currently available in place and to improve them. We would like it to be a participative process that allows staff and the wider public to have their say on the future of such a valuable asset to the community. We enclose 3,068 signatures from supporters of the Gallery and its services.”

The local member, Maureen Compton, sent in the following written submission to support the petition:

“I have spent many hours arguing to keep the Shire Hall where it is and the library before that. The Shire Hall Gallery is a jewel in the crown of Stafford and it is in the right place to exhibit art and craft works. I argued strongly for the library to be kept in the Shire Hall but lost the battle. We have to keep the Shire Hall open as a beacon for the arts. The people of Stafford will not forgive any councillor who votes to close that building. We need to enhance the arts in Stafford not destroy it.”

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities thanked Ms. Henderson for her articulate speech in support of the petition. She informed members that the Arts Offer proposal was to deliver a community based service which would enable wider engagement and involvement. This would be taken to Cabinet in January 2017 and a feasibility study on the future purpose and use of the Shire Hall would also be presented to Cabinet in January.

[Note by Clerk: The Arts Offer proposal has now been deferred to the Cabinet meeting on 15 February 2017]

The provision of an Arts Service was not a statutory requirement for the County Council, and in the present challenging financial climate it was not possible to continue with the current arrangements. However the decision to implement a new model had not yet been agreed. As part of the proposed changes to the Arts Offer the Multi-Sensory Room would be moved to Staffordshire Place. Statistics indicated a reduction in the number of both visitors and organised trips by school children to the Shire Hall Gallery. The redefined Arts Service offer would involve countywide touring exhibitions which would be held in libraries, local museums, district council offices and colleges. The intention was that this would broaden opportunities for the community to participate in cultural activities and would have a greater impact on vulnerable people.

A member expressed disappointment that a proper plan for the venue had not been put in place before starting to dismantle the Arts Service. It was queried whether it would be possible to consider alternative uses for the Shire Hall whilst continuing to preserve what was currently provided there. It was of concern that no proper costings had been put forward in relation to the proposed touring exhibitions and it was requested that a more detailed report on this be brought back to the Select Committee prior to any decision being made. Members were informed that these details would be included in the revised Cabinet report in the New Year.

A member pointed out that there was currently a country-wide crisis in Adult Social Care and that the authority had a statutory responsibility to provide services for people who couldn't help themselves. He also expressed the view that a touring Arts Service would be better for the rest of the county.

In wide-ranging and lengthy debate a number of opposing views were voiced. However it was agreed that the Cabinet Member should bring back more detailed pre-decision plans around the Arts and Community Service to the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee for consideration at their meeting on 19 January 2017. The Chairman undertook to forward the petition to the Cabinet Member for Communities and the Environment, together with the Select Committee's comments.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) a more detailed report on proposals for Staffordshire's Arts Service be brought to the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee meeting on 19 January 2017; and
- b) the Chairman forward the petition and the Select Committee's comments to the Cabinet Member for Communities and the Environment.

28. Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Review of Post-16 Further Education and Training Institutions

In July 2015 the Government published a policy statement which set out how they intended to facilitate the restructuring of the post-16 education and training sector, through a series of Area Based Reviews of provision which were led on behalf of the Government by the FE Commissioner. The Review commenced in Staffordshire in February 2016 and the final report was published at the end of November. The implementation of the Review recommendations would be supported by a national restructuring fund of £570 million which institutions could access provided they met the published criteria.

The aim of the Review was to ensure that there was sufficient capacity to meet the needs of students and employers in the area and to take steps to improve the financial sustainability of colleges in the future. At the time of the Review both Stafford College and Stoke-on-Trent College were subject to Financial Notices of Concern from the Skills Funding Agency. The Review covered both FE and Sixth-Form Colleges, but did not include School Sixth Forms. A steering group, chaired by the FE Commissioner, was convened to oversee and steer the Review's work. Membership included representatives from the LEP, Local Authorities, DfE and Department for Business Innovation and Skills, and Chairs of Governors from each institution in scope for the Review. However, the approach taken by the FE Commissioner across the Country was to seek consensus on any recommendations with the governing bodies of individual institutions required to sign off the final recommendations.

The following were identified by the Review as key areas for change:

- resolving the position of Stoke-on-Trent College, and seeking to ensure that all colleges in Staffordshire are on a strong, sustainable financial footing;
- rapidly improving quality at Stafford College and ensuring that planned changes at Burton and South Derbyshire College deliver improvements in time for their next Ofsted inspection;
- growing apprenticeship provision, and responding to the LEP and employers in relation to need for higher level skills, improved work-readiness, and better quality of information, advice and careers guidance;

- supporting the LEP and the local authorities in ensuring a good match between post 16 provision and the identified skills needs, job opportunities and future growth in priority sectors;
- boosting the educational levels of residents and the economic success of Stoke-on-Trent; and
- to consider how colleges can increase and improve provision for high needs students, in response to the needs identified by Staffordshire local authority, specifically the needs of learners with social, emotional and mental health and severe learning difficulties, and to develop an offer based around employment focused, internship type provision.

The Steering Group agreed the following six Review recommendations:

- Newcastle-under-Lyme College and Stafford College to merge to form a single college;
- City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College to pursue academisation;
- Burton and South Derbyshire College to remain stand-alone;
- South Staffordshire College to merge with Walsall College to form a single college;
- Stoke-on-Trent College to develop an appropriate option to secure sustainability, in collaboration with local partners, by end of October 2016; and
- The formation of a new strategic forum involving the LEPs, local authorities and colleges to monitor progress and provide oversight of the implementation of the Review's recommendations.

It was agreed that the quality of the buildings was not a guarantee of success, and that quality of teaching was what impacted on Ofsted inspections. The Cabinet Member for Learning and skills commented that when the finances were right, and the right leadership was in place this was conducive to the recruitment of good quality lecturers. Members were reassured that the intention was to offer a full curriculum at Newcastle-under-Lyme College and Stafford College, and in the main they would manage their own catchment areas. Similarly, there was no suggestion that provision would be affected in Tamworth by the merger of South Staffordshire and Walsall Colleges. However concern was expressed over the travel consequences for Tamworth students potentially having to travel to Walsall, in terms of both distance and costs.

Members requested further information on the numbers of students at each institution who were affected by the Review, which had taken catchment areas and travel into account.

English and Maths remained an issue for Colleges, and members were informed that Stoke-on-Trent College, the City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College and the University were having discussions about the 14 – 19 offer across the city. There was also a concern that an appropriate option had not been confirmed for Stoke-on-Trent College.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee note the outcomes and recommendations of the Post-16 Area Review and the anticipated impact on Staffordshire residents; and
- b) further details on the numbers of students affected by the Review be requested.

29. Staffordshire Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan

The Select Committee considered the Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Plan (HIAMP) for Staffordshire, and the content of the Policy and Strategy which has been developed to fit within the available budget.

Staffordshire County Council was responsible for a highway asset valued at over £7 billion providing benefit to all as stakeholders. The highway network was the largest and most visible asset for which the County Council was responsible and included over 6000 km of carriageway. The way it was managed and maintained had a direct impact on the County Councils' ability to deliver the vision of "a connected Staffordshire, where everyone has the opportunity to prosper, be healthy and happy".

In recent years the investment in highway infrastructure and its performance had been increasingly under the spotlight. The current financial challenges and increased public demands and expectations had meant the management of the Council's highway assets had never been more important to ensure it achieves its outcomes.

Having a documented approach to highway asset management was good practice and allowed the Council to gain maximum available funding from the Department for Transport's Self Assessment/Incentivised funding process. To achieve the maximum funding it was also a requirement that the HIAMP was approved by Cabinet. Consequently it would be considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 18 January, when they would also be informed of the comments of this Select Committee in order to take these into account in their consideration of this matter.

In accordance with national guidance, the Policy was a short and concise document that described the principles adopted in applying asset management to achieve the authority's strategic objectives. The Strategy was a concise high level document setting out how highway infrastructure asset management was delivered for the authority to meet its long term outcomes and objectives.

The draft HIAMP Policy and Strategy went out to public consultation from 10 August to 9 October 2016. Thirty two responses had been received, the majority of which were broadly supportive of all aspects of the plan, particularly the aspirations and the commitments to achieving these with an information strategy and proactive prioritisation and planning of highway schemes further into the future. The majority of comments had been reflected in the current draft documents. Actions taken in response to the consultation included: improved clarity and emphasis on the purpose of the HIAMP; increased use of plain English where possible; and removal of the Carriageway Asset Value Management Prioritisation Example Toolkit.

Members raised concerns over the public perception that the County Council was responsible for local highways capital maintenance funding and the criticism levelled at County Councillors as a consequence. With regard to the 5% per annum that was currently top sliced from capital grant funding to contribute to corporate capital projects, members commented that it would be helpful for them to be informed where this was being spent.

In the near to medium future the majority of funding would be provided by the Secretary of State for Transport, including further funding from the allocation of the Incentive Fund scheme to reward councils who demonstrated that they were delivering using good asset management principles and value for money in carrying out cost effective improvements. Members proposed that the Cabinet Member should lobby Central Government for more funding to protect the highways asset in Staffordshire.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan be endorsed;
- b) the content of the Policy and Strategy of the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan be noted; and
- c) the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport write to the Secretary of State for Transport to lobby for more funding to protect the highways asset in Staffordshire.

30. Innovation Centre No.6, Keele University

Members considered the County Council's involvement in the proposed Mercia Centre for Innovation Leadership (MCIL) on the Keele Science and Innovation Park, Keele University, through the creation of Innovation Centre No. 6 (IC6) within the MCIL development. This would build on the success of the County Council investment in Innovation Centre No. 5 (IC5), and every indication was that this project was going to be a significant success.

MCIL was a £17.5m project focused on nurturing leadership and management skills in students, entrepreneurs and innovation-intensive developing businesses. The project aimed to address current skills gaps and ultimately drive innovation and high value business growth in the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership area. There were two main aspects to the offer: a £12m statement building to house the MCIL function and the University's delivery of the aforementioned skills agenda whilst funding the £5.5m revenue costs.

Keele University were leading on the design and development of the project. They would secure all the necessary funding, commission the construction of the building and own the building once it was completed. The County Council's support for the Mercia Centre would be to take a long lease on the IC6 element of the building. The County Council would make an initial capital payment of £2.02m, with a peppercorn rent thereafter.

There was a mixed response from members to the proposal to make a capital investment in this project. Some members supported this initiative in incentivising business and growth in the area. However, in the earlier debate on future funding for

the Arts Service the argument had been made that the County Council should only be funding those services where it had a statutory duty to provide them. In the light of this argument Mrs. Peaple requested that her lack of support for this project be recorded, expressed disappointment that the same effort had not been put into saving the Arts Service, and questioned why Keele University was not borrowing to fund the project. The Cabinet Member for Economic Growth responded that economic growth was supported all over the County, because with it came prosperity. It was also hoped that students graduating from the University would remain and take up employment in Staffordshire.

Members debated the funding arrangements and were reassured that if funding from Newcastle Borough Council's business rates, and approval to contribute this funding from the Business Rates Pool Board, was not approved then the project would not go ahead. The Cabinet Member agreed to keep the Select Committee updated on progress with this development.

RESOLVED – That the principles and processes being undertaken in the development of the £2.02m investment in Innovation Centre No 6 on the Keele Science and Innovation Park at Keele University be noted.

31. Work Programme

The Select Committee received a copy of their 2016-17 Work Programme. Members noted that the following items be added:

- the Arts Service report be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee for pre-decision scrutiny; and
- Post-16 Education Provision

RESOLVED – That the additions to the Work Programme be noted.

Chairman