

Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 19 January 2017

Present: Simon Tagg (Chairman)

Attendance

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

Also in attendance: Ben Adams and Mark Winnington

PART ONE

32. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

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

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

34. School Attainment

The Select Committee scrutinised the progress of educational achievement in Staffordshire for the period September 2015 to August 2016.

Members were informed that there was a positive direction of travel in terms of the percentage of schools judged as good or outstanding (and the percentage of all pupils that attend these schools). As at September 2016, 86% of Staffordshire schools were judged as good or outstanding, which was below their aspirational target of 90%. This was hindered by the reduction in the number of school inspections during the academic year. Staffordshire had improved at the same rate as seen nationally. The number of pupils receiving a good education had also increased, with 82% of pupils attending a good or outstanding school, an increase of six percentage points since 2015.

The new primary, secondary and post-16 accountability measures introduced in 2016 by the Department for Education (DfE) had resulted in limited trend comparisons being made over time.

Levels of attainment and progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Key Stage One (KS1) remained strong and continued to outperform national levels of performance. However, the focus in 2016/17 would continue to be on Key Stage Two (KS2), Key Stage Four (KS4) and Key Stage 5 (KS5) where schools needed to accelerate improvements to gain ground in the rates of attainment and progress achieved by our statistical neighbours and nationally. Staffordshire schools also needed to do more to tackle variations in attainment and progress between localities, phases and for different pupil groups, such as those eligible for Free School Meals or Disadvantaged pupils.

Members were informed that over the past few years education in Staffordshire (and across the country) had changed. Schools were becoming more independent from local authorities and as a result there were new roles and responsibilities around school improvement.

Members received a more detailed explanation of the changes to performance measures in 2016 which had made it difficult to scrutinise trends. Nevertheless, concern was expressed that the Free School Meals and Special Educational Needs gap in Staffordshire had narrowed in some measures in 2016 and widened in others. The Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills acknowledged that the Council fell short of its aspirations in this regard and agreed to provide Members with further information on this issue.

In relation to the English Baccalaureate, the Committee were informed that a greater proportion of secondary schools were not offering this qualification. It was queried whether this was due to the fact that a foreign language was a compulsory component. The Cabinet Member suggested that there would need to be a culture change in attitudes towards learning a language, post-Brexit. Moving forward there should be more partnership working to share expertise, with specialist teachers being available to clusters of schools. The School Improvement Team was currently undertaking work to explore take-up of the Baccalaureate.

Members queried how the direction of travel of pupil attainment could be influenced. The Cabinet Member responded that one measure would be to attract more and high quality sponsors. Government Funding for School Improvement was available through Teaching Schools. Work was being undertaken with the four designated Teaching Schools in Staffordshire, together with Entrust, focussing on areas requiring support. This work included ongoing teacher support, research around best practice, and the quality of new teachers. Work was also being undertaken with the Regional Schools Commissioner around support for Leadership and Management in schools. The Cabinet Member commented that the team of the Regional Schools Commissioner was growing, and that Staffordshire had a good relationship with the Commissioner.

Concern was expressed over the decline in pupil attainment through Key Stages two, four and five and it was suggested that performance was going backwards. However the Cabinet Member pointed out that there was no evidence of a drop in performance, and that three years ago attainment at Key Stage 2 had been of national concern and that this was no longer the case. Whilst progress was being made in all areas the authority was not where it aspired to be. The aim was to have the best leadership and governance in place and funding spent on teachers. Historically Staffordshire had been

underfunded for a number of years, but the Government were now reviewing the position. It would be important for schools to work both together and in partnerships to succeed.

In relation to the Free School Meal Gap it was queried whether schools might be using the pupil premium funding to close this, and how the use of this funding was monitored. The Committee were assured that governing bodies had a statutory responsibility to report where this funding is spent and its impact. Another concern was the use of supply staff, particularly in the secondary sector. Members discussed the relationship between Ofsted ratings of schools and the local authority's recent categorisation of schools.

Members requested further information on the impact of the new funding formula on their local schools. The Cabinet Member commented that under the Fairer Funding arrangements it was expected that Staffordshire schools would do well, although there would be winners and losers.

The Chairman pointed out that there was an item on the Work Programme around post-16 education provision and the Cabinet Member undertook to bring this to the Committee as soon as it was available.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) the progress of Educational Achievement in Staffordshire for the period September 2015 – August 2016 be noted;
- b) further information on the Free School Meals and Special Educational Needs gap in Staffordshire be circulated to members of the Select Committee; and
- c) further information on the Fairer Funding Review be brought to a future meeting of the Select Committee.

35. Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub

Members considered a report on the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub and its programme in supporting Staffordshire businesses to start up, thrive and grow. It also unlocked investment and job creation among local businesses and improved cross-referral between business support initiatives, innovation and international trade. The Hub had supported 3,852 businesses since it was launched in May 2014, 10% of which related to key growth sectors in manufacturing and 15% in Professional, Scientific and Technical services. Of the calls to the helpline, 26% of calls related to access to finance and were referred to other business support schemes such as the Staffordshire County Council loan fund which administered 68 loans supporting the creation of 165 jobs and safeguarding 133 jobs. The helpline identified needs and then passed the enquiry to the appropriate advisor. Enquiries covered areas such as growth start-up, premises and apprenticeships, and the Hub held a database of a wide range of suppliers. Members were asked to help to promote the Growth Hub services to local businesses of all sectors and sizes by raising awareness of the Staffordshire Business Helpline and the Growth Hub Advisors. Members recognised the contribution that the key partners, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce, made in the Growth Hub.

The creation of Growth Hubs was a government initiative introduced across the Country in 2013. They were a local public/private sector partnership led by the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and they joined up national and local business support so that it was easy for businesses to find the help that they needed. As of May 2016 the national network of Growth Hubs was complete for the first time, as all 39 LEP areas had an operational Hub. Members asked about the relationship with other Hubs in other LEP areas, and were assured that information was shared and businesses were cross-referred between them.

The Select Committee discussed the potential impact of Brexit on Staffordshire's economy and on future funding for the Growth Hub, post March 2019. Members were informed that a new small business grant fund was offering businesses a grant of between £1,500 and £10,000 to spend on capital items which would provide benefit and growth to their organisation. A Panel evaluates each company's application to ensure they met the criteria and all businesses awarded a grant of over £5,000 were expected to create a new job within their organisation. Members requested further clarification on the small business grant fund and it was agreed that this would be provided to them in writing.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) the success of the Growth Hub programme in supporting Staffordshire businesses to start up, thrive and grow be recognised;
- b) the success of the Growth Hub programme in unlocking investment and job creation among local businesses and improving cross-referral between business support initiatives, innovation and international trade support be noted;
- c) committee members help to promote the Growth Hub services to local businesses of all sectors and sizes by raising awareness of the Staffordshire Business Helpline and the Growth Hub Advisors;
- d) the role that the key partners, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce, play in the Growth Hub be recognised; and
- e) further clarification on the small business grant fund be provided to members of the Select Committee in writing.

36. Work Programme

The Select Committee received a copy of their 2016-17 Work Programme. Members noted the following amendment:

- that a report on Adult and Community Learning [**Note by Clerk:** now entitled "Skills and Employability Self-Assessment Report 2015/16"] was to be brought to the March meeting in place of Post-16 Education Provision.

The Rev Preb Michael Metcalf thanked members for their comments on the new Staffordshire Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education and warmly invited them to attend its official launch at Entrust Headquarters in Stafford on 31 January 2017 at 2.00 pm.

Chairman