

**Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 26 February 2021**

Present: Ian Parry (Chairman)

**Attendance**

Tina Clements (Vice-Chairman)	Kyle Robinson
Keith Flunder	Jessica Shulman
Syed Hussain	David Smith
Ian Lawson	Simon Tagg
Alastair Little	Bernard Williams
Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf	

**Also in attendance:** Mark Deaville, Julia Jessel, Jonathan Price and Philip White

**PART ONE**

**111. Declarations of Interest**

Keith Flunder declared an interest in the minutes (item 109), as a recipient of grant support.

**112. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 15 January 2021**

**RESOLVED** - That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

**113. HS2 Update - Impact on Staffordshire**

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Economy updated the committee on the economic impact of HS2 in Staffordshire and the action taken to mitigate it. The County Council did not support HS2 and recognised the significant human impact of the scheme. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member confirmed that he remained focused on getting the best deal for Staffordshire in terms of mitigation, compensation for residents, improved connectivity and economic benefits.

He identified some positives - following petitioning during the parliamentary process for Phase One, the Handsacre link would be constructed with potential large scale development in Stafford coming on the back of that. HS2 Ltd had committed to use local suppliers, materials and labour in Staffordshire where possible and although difficult to quantify, there would be spending in local communities by the HS2 workforce. There was also potential for delivery of HS2 highway works through the I+ partnership which could generate income for the council and there could be some opportunities for apprenticeships and local jobs created.

However, there would be disruption to drivers on the road network during construction as well as disruption due to construction noise. There would inevitably be loss of environmental habitats although the economic impact of these was difficult to quantify there would be impact on tourism.

Any real benefits would not be felt until after construction and were not defined – the stop at Stafford should generate a boost to the economy of the town centre – and there were opportunities in the north of the county opening up the A53 corridor.

The Chairman acknowledged that while any benefit to the county was some way off, already the disruption was being felt and asked to what extent the council understood the positives and negatives and how well prepared are they.

The Cabinet Member said that there had been a clear commitment from HS2 to use local goods and services but that had not been quantified. The HS2 Project Manager agreed that HS2 had not quantified their intentions clearly but they had made the supply chain and local businesses aware of them.

A Member described work ongoing by HS2 in Hints and the significant disruption that was causing with very little support from HS2. Many complaints had been made by local residents. The Cabinet Member acknowledged the disruption at Hints. The Member regretted that south east Staffordshire were not likely to experience any direct benefit from HS2 due to the decision to not open a station in the locality but were experiencing the grief.

A Member welcomed improved connectivity in the north of the county and hoped opportunities would be taken to improve existing rail services as a result.

The Cabinet Member said there had been some research into offsetting the impact of HS2 and improving other lines and there was ongoing dialogue with the DfT. He believed all lines would benefit from linking to HS2 and there was potential to connect the Moorlands with Stoke – this would be explored further. When the construction phase gets underway other benefits could be identified.

A Member acknowledged that there had already been benefits to Kidsgrove station as developers and investors had focussed activity there since there was a possibility of HS2 coming through to Crewe. It was important to address residents' concerns however and the council must be ready to support them. The Cabinet Member agreed that the Councils response had been ongoing for many years and its role continued to be to extract the maximum benefit and to mitigate any damage.

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change was clear on her duty to hold HS2 to account and to minimise the impact of harm to the environment.

The select committee would have an important role in monitoring the ongoing impact of HS2 and holding both the Cabinet Member and HS2 to account.

**RESOLVED** - That (a) the work undertaken in relation to HS2 programme be noted;

(b) the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee include HS2 as a standing item at each meeting to be attended by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Economy and /or the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change and for a representative from HS2 to attend on a quarterly basis to address the committees concerns and explore opportunities.

#### **114. Update on Return to Schools and School Transport**

##### Return to Schools

The Cabinet Member for Education and SEND updated members on activity in schools during the third lockdown and preparations for returning children back into schools from 8 March 2021 in line with Government direction.

All schools had remained open for vulnerable children and those of key workers and only closed if there was a local outbreak. The Local Outbreak Control Team had been very effective managing the situation and liaising with schools. Average daily attendance had been significantly higher than the first lockdown.

The remote learning offer had been continuously refined and developed over the period and was now comparable with the accepted core learning offer. Whilst Ofsted routine inspections had been suspended, monitoring assessments continued to monitor performance.

The Cabinet Member described the situation regarding lateral flow tests for staff and children in primary and senior settings. Dedicated transport continued to be provided. Schools were preparing for full reopening on 8 March for all pupils except those shielding or isolating.

In terms of public examinations, grades would be determined by teachers who would be required to provide their evidence base. Results would be quality checked by exam boards.

The Chairman identified two key aspects in reviewing the lockdown and going forward - the health and safety of the school community and the implications of that on the wider community and secondly, the quality of learning which in recent months had appeared to be improved and developed. He asked the Cabinet Member if he knew how schools had been managing particularly their relationship with parents. The general consensus was that teachers far preferred a classroom setting for learning but the remote offer had improved significantly since it had started. Issues about IT had also largely been resolved.

The Cabinet Member praised the work of all teachers and school leaders in their transition to a remote learning platform. The Assistant Director for Education Strategy and Improvement acknowledged that schools had developed their remote learning offer and they continued to identify the most vulnerable cohort to maintain ongoing dialogue.

A Member said that home learning had been a huge challenge for parents and asked how cohorts of children would catch up with what they must have missed and how would the quality of education resume. He felt school's liaison with parents could have

been better and acknowledged that community links with primary schools had improved and hoped this would continue going forward.

The Cabinet Member said that Government funding to schools to enable pupils to catch up during school holidays had been announced. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People had received funding for holiday activities but this was not necessarily for education.

The Assistant Director said that it was early days but Sir Kevan Collins had just been announced as the new Commissioner for Education Recovery and £1bn funding (equating to approx. £80per pupil) had been committed for 'catch up'.

There were three elements:

- Further additional recovery premium for the most disadvantaged (this would be linked to pupil premium)
- Summer schools for secondary pupils
- Perhaps most importantly, an enrichment strand which picks up on emotional health and preparing children for education again.

The detail would be considered soon and they would consider the long term impact on social and cognitive skills over the coming months.

The Chairman acknowledged that it was difficult to ensure participation in remote learning and assess participation and engagement. A focus of the catch up must be addressing the significant gap which will have developed between children. The Assistant Director accepted that some pupils had participated better than others but schools had tried hard to encourage and engage and had kept records of engagement.

A Member acknowledged the huge challenge that home learning had meant to schools and thanked the authority for their managing of free school meals and Holiday hunger initiative. He asked about priority vaccinations for teachers.

The Cabinet Member said that in terms of rolling out the vaccination programme in Staffordshire, the Director of Public health had followed Government guidance despite some local MPs lobbying but anyone working with vulnerable children would have been offered the vaccine.

The co-opted Member representing Parents and Governors believed schools had responded well to the challenges and school governors particularly had stepped up and been very supportive. She asked about Year 10 work experience which was a valuable opportunity for those pupils and oughtn't to be missed.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged the supportive role of Governors during the last months and agreed the importance of year 10 work experience. The Chairman asked the Co-opted member to champion the matter of year 10 work experience which could perhaps be fitted in later in the school year, and to report back to the select committee.

A Member suggested that distance learning had many advantages not least the opportunity to monitor performance without the need for Ofsted. The Cabinet Member agreed there was an opportunity for more blended learning in the future but the best

place for children to learn was the classroom. The best learning from the last year would be taken forward but technology was to enhance school experience not replace it.

The Chairman asked whether there had been any assessment of digital learning in terms of equal access. The Assistant Director said that the delivery of IT devices would now be by the schools and not the local authority. Over 4200 additional devices had been provided. Broadband access had in many cases also been required. The picture was mixed across the county but where there were gaps, the council had worked with pupils to ensure access to learning.

Unanimously, Members were appreciative of the efforts of schools, parents and governors over the last year.

### School Transport

The Cabinet Member updated members on the impact of the pandemic on school transport. His aim had been to provide safe home to school transport for all eligible pupils who needed it and to try and increase capacity on the public transport network for non-entitled pupils. This had involved working with and supporting transport operators (public bus, coach and taxi) and ensure their businesses are supported through the Covid-19 pandemic. The Cabinet Member said that the authority had a good working relationship with the transport operators as a result. In addition, the Cabinet Member advised that Traffic Demand Management Plans had been prepared for the vast majority of the schools in Staffordshire prior to the commencement of the autumn term in order to encourage active travel for all home to school movements and minimise car congestion at the school gate. The task now was to be ready to return to full operations from 8 March and due to careful planning, the Cabinet Member did not foresee any issues.

A Member raised a problem with a specific route in his constituency and the Cabinet Member agreed to address the matter outside of the meeting.

A Member acknowledged that transport operators were currently transporting people to and from vaccination centres and were a valuable service in their community.

**RESOLVED** - That the update on return to school and school transport be noted.

### 115. Work Programme

The Committee agreed to the inclusion in their work programme of the Staffordshire Adult Community Learning Self Assessment annual report and of a standing item on HS2. The Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education annual report would be circulated to members for information.

Members discussed Climate Change and whether the annual report should be received by the Select Committee. It was agreed that as Climate Change was a corporate matter, it should be presented to Corporate Review Committee.

**RESOLVED** - That the work programme be amended to include the items detailed.

**116. Exclusion of the Public**

**RESOLVED** – That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business which involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Schedule 12A (as amended) of the Local Government Act 1972 indicated below.

**117. HWRC Update**

(Exemption paragraph 3)

**Chairman**