

Minutes of the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 9 November 2023

Present: Tina Clements (Chair)

Attendance	
Charlotte Atkins	Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf
Philippa Haden	David Smith
Philip Hudson	Samantha Thompson
Graham Hutton	Ross Ward (Vice-Chair (Scrutiny))
Peter Kruskonjic (Vice-Chair (Overview))	Bernard Williams

Also in attendance: Anthony Baines, Jonathan Lindop and Philip White

Apologies:

Part One

27. Minutes of meeting held on 17 October 2023

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

28. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

29. Community Learning Self-Assessment Report 2022 - 2023

The Committee considered a report of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills regarding Staffordshire Community Learning Service's Annual Self-Assessment for 2022/23 (schedule 1 to the signed minutes).

The Service provided a range of formal and informal education and training opportunities to meet the needs of learners (aged 19 years and over), the economy and wider community across Staffordshire. Their work was funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) through direct grant totalling £1.6 per annum. However, an additional £4.2m (over a three year period) had been secured in 2022 to deliver the Multiply Programme which aimed to help adults improve their numeracy skills.

Learning programmes were delivered by both the Direct Delivery Unit and various Partner organisations who targeted and prioritised vulnerable adults with barriers to learning.

The four main strands of delivery during the year were:- (i) Community Learning Framework 2019-2023; (ii) Community Learning Trust Responsiveness Fund; (iii) Wider Family Learning Grants and; (iv) Direct Delivery (Accredited Provision – Adult Skills), with courses being provided through a combination of classroom based, online and hybrid/blended learning.

The Service's Annual Self-Assessment was based on service-wide data and other evidence including:- (i) learner feedback; (ii) information on learner destinations; (iii) course documentation and; (iv) quality monitoring reports. The process involved benchmarking against an internal Quality and Performance Framework together with Ofsted's Education and Inspection Framework (2019) which defined the criteria for high quality provision and continual improvement and monitoring.

OFSTED had introduced a new Education Inspection Framework in 2019 according to which Staffordshire achieved an overall rating of 'Good' for 2021/22. In addition, a full inspection of the service was undertaken between 31 January and 2 February 2023 which had resulted in an Overall Effectiveness score of 'Good'.

However, measurement of performance against Key Performance indicators for the year, by the Service, had identified the following areas for improvement:- (i) significant rapid improvement in outcomes for learners of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and digital courses, especially for Black and Minority Ethnic Learners; managers must implement relevant strategies to support and improve attendance; (ii) effective information and advice and clear progression pathways; (iii) personalised learning goals and outcomes to provide sufficient challenge, especially for more able learners, to demonstrate the progress learners make on-course and towards longer term aspirations and; (iv) use of effective initial and diagnostic assessments to develop appropriate English and Maths learning outcomes. It was hoped that significant improvement in the above-mentioned areas could be achieved by December 2023.

During the full and wide-ranging discussion which ensued, Members gave detailed scrutiny to the work of the Service and results of the annual Self-Assessment, asking questions, seeking clarification and raising issues of concern as necessary, including:- (i) the various measures being implemented to mitigate against slower learner recruitment; (ii) the timing of courses having regard to learners' potential work commitments and the need to improve recruitment/accessibility; (iii) how the long term aspirations of learners were being met through the provision of additional support by the County Council; (iv) attendance rates during the current term; (v) how the KPIs could be reconfigured to better capture data relating ethnicity and gender; (vi) involvement of employers in the

delivery of courses and engagement with learners; (vii) benchmarking Staffordshire's performance with that of comparable Authorities; (viii) take-up of courses by learners with SEND and how the service offer could be better tailored to suit their needs and; (ix) engagement with people not in education, employment and training (NEETS).

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received and noted;

(b) That the 'Good' performance of the Community Learning Service during 2022/23 be welcomed.

(c) That the Cabinet Member continue his efforts to address the above-mentioned areas of weakness with a view to achieving significant improvement by December 2023.

(d) That the Cabinet Member consider reconfiguring future Self-Assessment reports to the Committee to include Key Performance Indicators listed by gender.

(e) That the Cabinet Member consider reconfiguring future Self-Assessment reports to the Committee to better illustrate learners by ethnicity so that any inequalities highlighted can be addressed, as appropriate.

30. Annual Street Works Permit Scheme Reports and Draft Traffic and Network Management Plan

The Committee considered a report of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport regarding the County Council's Annual Street Works Permit Schemes for Years 1 and 2 (1 April 2020 to 31 March 2022) and draft Traffic and Network Management Plan (schedule 2 to the signed minutes).

The County Council's Cabinet approved the introduction of a permit scheme for all publicly maintained roads within Staffordshire, in August 2019, in exercise of its powers under section 33A (2) of the Traffic Management Act 2004. The effect of an Order under the Act was to require Statutory Promoters (including utility companies and the Highway Authority) to apply for a permit to undertake work on the Highway rather than to give notice of their intention to carry out work. In promoting such an Order it was anticipated that the Authority could exercise greater control of work by third parties for the purposes of:- (i) achieving value for money; (ii) promoting better working practices; (iii) improving coordination and quality of works; (iv) keeping residents and Highway users better informed of works in their areas and; (v) reducing the impact of essential works.

At their meeting on 18 March 2020 Cabinet agreed that the County

Council should become a Permit Authority for road and street works with effect from 1 April 2020 and Members noted that since going live, the number of applications for Permits and Variations had increased significantly.

A legal requirement of the scheme was that Annual Reports should be produced by Highway Authorities for each of the first three years of operation and then each third year thereafter. The format of these Reports was set out in The Highway Authorities and Utilities Committee (HAUC) England Advice Note published in January 2016. Also, schemes were required to operate on a 'cost neutral' basis with all funds generated being used for their function.

Members heard that the Traffic and Network Management Plan (TNMP) would formalise the operation of the Permit Scheme with other policies such as the Authority's Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan and Bus Service Improvement Plan and how the approach of the County Council's Traffic and Network Management Team, who were responsible for processing Permit applications, influenced the Local Transport Plan, currently under review.

During the full and wide-ranging discussion which ensued, Members gave detailed scrutiny to the Annual Report and draft TNMP headings, asking questions, seeking clarification and raising issues of concern as necessary, including:- (i) the suitability of diversion routes promoted by Statutory Undertakers; (ii) the need to ensure temporary signage was removed from sites on completion of highway works; (iii) payment of penalties by Statutory Undertakers and measures available to the Highway Authority to recover arrears/outstanding debt; (iv) channels of communication with Statutory Undertakers and how these might be improved for the benefit of local residents; (v) 'Local' Member involvement in resolving Highway issues; (vi) the level of fines imposed for breaches of permit conditions and; (vii) procedures under the scheme for resolving defective work.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received and noted.

(b) That the Street Works Permit Scheme Annual Report for Years 1 and 2 (1 April 2020 – 31 March 2022) indicating the successful operation of the Scheme during that time, be welcome.

(c) That the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport consider lobbying Central Government regarding the level of fees and charges applicable under the Scheme to ensure they better reflect the scope of the Authority's strategic aims, as set out above.

(d) That the proposed format/headings for the Traffic and Network Management Plan be supported and that the draft Plan be presented to

the Committee for Scrutiny when it becomes available in Spring 2024.

31. Work Programme

RESOLVED – That, subject to consideration of 'Natural Environment Strategy' being postponed to their meeting on 13 December 2023 at the request of the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change, the updated Work Programme (schedule 3 to the signed minutes) be approved.

32. Date of Next Meeting - Wednesday 22 November 2023 at 2.30 pm

RESOLVED – That the date, time and venue of the next meeting be noted.

Chair