

Minutes of the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 28 September 2023

Present:

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: Jonathan Lindop, Philip White and David Williams

Apologies: Tina Clements and Hannah Gallimore

Part One

15. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

16. Minutes of meeting held on 6 July 2023

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

17. Employment and Skills Strategy

The Committee considered a report of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills regarding the production of a draft Employment and Skills Strategy for Staffordshire (schedule 1 to the signed minutes).

The Strategy set out the Authority's vision for Staffordshire's workforce and identified priorities aimed at better equipping them to meet future economic challenges and thrive in a pioneering and dynamic County. It supported the delivery of the County's Economic Strategy which had been adopted in March 2022 covering the period to 2030.

Members heard that the Vision was:-

"Developing local skills which enable more people to access higher value, better paid jobs across a wide range of priority and locally important sectors, to help deliver a diverse, inclusive and sustainable economy

acrossStaffordshire”; and;

the mission for local employment and skills stakeholders was to:-

“Create strong and effective partnerships which support our people to gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to achieve their ambitions and play a productive role in the growth of the Staffordshire economy”.

The five priorities identified in the draft Strategy were:- “(i) Ensuring All Are Work Ready and Can Access Employment; (ii) Providing Inspirational Careers Advice; (iii) Developing Technical Skills to Drive Productivity and Growth; (iv) Supporting Innovation and Enterprise and; (v) Creating a Place of Learning”.

Members heard that the draft Strategy had been subject to a four week public/partner consultation period during which positive feedback had been received with 87% of respondents either ‘strongly agreeing’ or ‘agreeing’ with the above-mentioned vision and 91% either ‘strongly agreeing’ or ‘agreeing’ with the Priorities. In addition, ongoing input and positive feedback was being received from key partners through forums including the Stoke-on-Trent, and Staffordshire Enterprise Partnership Skills Advisory Panel and College Principals Group etc.

The proposed delivery approach for the Strategy was to:- (i) work in partnership to lever and align public sector investment; (ii) match and maximise public and private sector investment e.g., Apprenticeship Levy; (iii) work with government on the opportunities for more powers and funding through devolution e.g., Adult Education Budget; (iv) maximise employer investment in skills and involvement in the design of skills provision and; (v) shape and influence the strategic commissioning of other funds and priorities e.g., HS2, West Midlands Freight Interchange, A50 A500 Strategic Corridor, the Local Skill Improvement Plan as a route to delivering technical skills.

During the full and wide-ranging discussion which ensued, Members gave detailed scrutiny to the draft Strategy, asking questions, seeking clarification and raising areas of concern as necessary including:- (i) the extent of partnership working which had taken place with Agricultural Colleges in the development of the Strategy; (ii) how the specific needs of disadvantaged and under represented groups were to be met under the Strategy; (iii) the potential impact of fast evolving areas of new technology eg Artificial Intelligence and how this had been addressed by the Strategy; (iv) new high-tech industry in the County and how it could be better supported by measures contained in the Strategy and; (v) engagement with year 10/11 school pupils prior to taking their GCSE Options.

In response to a request by the Committee the Cabinet Member undertook to explore how the County Council's engagement with school pupils (including those with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)) wishing to undertake work experience placements could be improved having regard to the various ambitions contained in the draft Strategy.

In conclusion, Members welcomed the draft Strategy and looked forward to continued positive performance by Staffordshire in attracting inward investment, developing local skills and improving the workforce's qualifications so that the priorities contained in their Strategic Plan could be effectively met.

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

(b) That the Cabinet Member have regard to the various comments made by the Committee in finalising Staffordshire's Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030.

(c) That the Cabinet Member explore how the County Council's engagement with school pupils (including those with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)) wishing to undertake work experience placements could be improved having regard to the various ambitions contained in the Strategy.

(d) That the Committee receive a progress update on implementation of the Strategy in six-months' time taking into consideration their other Work Programme priorities.

18. HS2 Impact on Staffordshire - Update

The Committee received an oral report and PowerPoint presentation (slides attached at Appendix 1 to the signed minutes) by HS2 giving them a six-monthly update on the impact of the development of the new high speed rail line (Phases 1 and 2a) on education and prosperity in Staffordshire.

The meeting was attended by HS2 Engagement Manager – Phase 1 (Paul Mullins) and; (ii) Senior Community Engagement Manager - Phase 2a (Victoria Roberts).

During the presentation, the representatives highlighted:- (i) the rephrasing of Phase 1 works and implications for Compounds, Utility Diversions and Security and Grounds Maintenance; (ii) their Communication Strategy; (iii) progress with regard to Phase 2a having regard to the rephrasing of Phase 1 (iv) Local Business Involvement; (v) Jobs and Skills: opportunities for local people; (vi) Jobs and Skills

opportunities;(vii) engagement undertaken with the Education sector; (viii) operation of the Community and Business Funds and; (ix) the Community Investment made.

In the discussion which ensued Members scrutinised and held HS2 to account over their efforts to safeguard/enhance prosperity in the County, raising various matters of concern including:- (i) the impact of rescheduling construction works on the sand and aggregate industry; (ii) the uncertainty surrounding an anticipated announcement by Government on the future of the project and the negative effect of this on the economy; (iii) the terms under which land previously subject to Compulsory Purchase Orders could be returned to its original owners; (iv) the unique difficulties in completing large scale infrastructure projects in Staffordshire and wider region/country; (v) further community projects which might be eligible for grant aid from HS2 and; (vi) the extent to which schools and other educational establishments had been engaged with by HS2 since their previous update to the Committee.

In response to requests from Members, the representatives of HS2 undertook to provide further details of:- (i) the projected impact of re-phasing of Phase 2a works on forecast job creation statistics for the County and; (ii) specific support they were making available to the Aggregates supply industry during this time.

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

(b) That the efforts made to date to maximise the opportunities available to Staffordshire residents from the construction of the high-speed rail line, by HS2 be welcomed.

(c) That a further update be brought to the Committee in April/May 2024.

(d) That any further information received in relation to the above-mentioned requests be forwarded to Members as soon as possible.

19. Highways Transformation Progress and Performance Quarterly Update

The Committee considered an oral report and PowerPoint presentation (slides attached at Appendix 2 to the signed minutes) of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport updating them on the progress made with regard to the Highways Transformation Programme.

During the report and presentation the Cabinet Member highlighted various Highway Schemes which had recently been completed including; (i) A522 Uttoxeter Road, Beamhurst, JCB Roundabout - Drainage,

Kerbing, Footway Patching and Carriageway Resurfacing Scheme (Budget Cost £300,000); (ii) A5195 Burntwood Roundabout - Carriageway Resurfacing Scheme (Budget Cost £35,000); (iii) A5192 Eastern Avenue, Lichfield - combined Integrated Transport and Structural Maintenance Scheme (Budget £300,000); (iv) B5027 Lichfield Road, Stone - Resurfacing Scheme (Budget £250,000); (v) A4601 Avon Road, Cannock - Drainage, Kerbing, Footway and Ironwork Carriageway Resurfacing Scheme (Budget £1.35m); (vi) A521 Uttoxeter Road, Blythe Bridge - Drainage Kerbing, Footway Patching and Carriageway Resurfacing Scheme (Budget £1.0m); (vii) A34 Stone Road, Stafford - Drainage, Kerbing, Footway and Carriageway Resurfacing Scheme (Budget £1.4m); (viii) A34 Walton Roundabout Stone - Drainage, kerbing and Carriageway Resurfacing Scheme (Budget £500,000) and; (ix) High Street, Tutbury - Carriageway Resurfacing Scheme (Budget £180,000).

In addition, the Cabinet Member informed them of:- (i) four other highway improvement schemes with a total value of £1.36m, which were nearing completion; (ii) a further twelve schemes with a total value of £4.58m, which were currently undergoing design and investigation work and; (iii) the highway Preventative Maintenance Programme for 2023/24 and 2024/25.

In the full and wide-ranging discussion which ensued, Members gave feedback/their views and spoke of their experiences with regard to the Transformation Programme to date, asking questions, seeking clarification and raising areas of concern as necessary, including:- (i) the impact of an increased use of electric vehicles on the Highway network; (ii) weed control and tree maintenance; (iii) Highway defects reporting arrangements; (iv) programming of Highway Works to minimise disruption especially outside schools and; (v) communication with local residents and Local Members about Highway works in their areas.

A Member spoke of the considerable disturbance caused to businesses in Blythe Bridge during the five-month closure of Uttoxeter Road which had led to the closure of some (previously well established) enterprises. In response to concerns expressed by the Committee, the Cabinet Member agreed to investigate what additional support (financial and practical) could be provided to local communities by the County Council in the future.

Members welcomed news of the additional investment which had been made in the Highways Network throughout the County, in particular the Member Prioritised Department for Transport Pothole Fund, which was critical to achieving the Authority's Strategic Priorities in relation to economic growth and connectivity.

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

(b) That satisfactory progress had been made in the Highways Transformation Programme to date.

(c) That the Cabinet Member be urged to have regard to the above mentioned comments in his work to implement the new future delivery model for Staffordshire Highways.

(d) That the Cabinet Member investigate what additional support (financial and practical) could be provided to local communities by the County Council during Highway Improvement Works, in the future.

20. Work Programme

RESOLVED – That the updated Work Programme (schedule 2 to the signed minutes) be approved.

21. Date of Next Meeting - Tuesday 17 October 2023 at 10.00 am, County Buildings, Stafford

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

Chair