

EDUCATION AND YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 DECEMBER 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold CH7 6NA on Thursday, 3rd December, 2015

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors Marion Bateman, Paul Cunningham, Andy Dunbobbin, Colin Legg, Phil Lightfoot, Dave Mackie, Nancy Matthews, Vicky Perfect, Nigel Steele-Mortimer, and Carolyn Thomas

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: David Hytch, Rebecca Stark and Rev. John Thelwell

APOLOGIES: Councillors Adele Davies-Cooke, David Healey and Janine Beggan.

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Education and Youth, Chief Officer (Education and Youth), Finance Manager, and Senior Manager School Improvement

IN ATTENDANCE:

Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator, and Committee Officer

37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Councillor Phil Lightfoot declared a personal interest in the following items as he was a school governor:

Item 4 – School Reserves as at 31 March 2015

Item 5 – School Standards Monitoring Group

38. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 September 2015 had been circulated to Members with the agenda.

Accuracy

Page 7: The Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator advised that Councillor Nancy Matthews was included in the nominations to sit on the School Transport Task & Finish Group and that the minutes would be amended to reflect this.

Matters arising

Page 5: Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer referred to the statement that a verbal update on School Modernisation would be placed on all future agendas and asked why this had not been included on the agenda for the current meeting.

The Facilitator advised that the intention had been to provide an update at meetings as and when there was sufficient development and information to share with members.

The Chair advised that a number of special meetings had been verbally arranged to take place during January and February 2016 to enable the Committee to consider the outcome of the consultations on school organisational change for Ysgol Llanfynydd, Ysgol Maes Edwin and Ysgol Mornant Gwespyr Picton, prior to consideration by Cabinet. The Facilitator advised that she would inform members of the arrangements for the meetings by email when confirmed. The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) reported that consultation in relation to Ysgol Maes Edwin and Ysgol Llanfynydd had now closed. Consultation in relation to Ysgol Mornant was still open and community representatives were being encouraged to engage in the consultation process.

In response to a question raised by Councillor Nancy Matthews concerning the next four schools to be discussed as part of the school organisational change process, which had been agreed at a previous Cabinet meeting, the Chief Officer explained that Officers were working closely with the schools concerned on preparatory work.

Councillor Chris Bithell referred to the Cabinet decision regarding school transport arrangements in the event that John Summers High School was to close and advised that Cabinet had addressed the concerns raised.

In response to the further questions and concerns raised by members around transition arrangements if John Summers High School was to close, the Chief Officer explained that the Authority could not override the role of parental preference in admissions arrangements.

Page 4: Mr. David Hytch advised that the first meeting of the Education for All Task and Finish Group had been held on 19 December 2015.

Page 6: Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer queried why the workshop on Integrated Youth Provision which had been scheduled to be held on 2 December 2015 had been cancelled. The Facilitator advised that the workshop was to be rescheduled to a date in the New Year. Councillor Marion Bateman commented on the suggestion that workshops be held in the evenings as well as mornings and afternoons. The Facilitator explained that a report was to be submitted to the next meeting of the Democratic Services Committee to consider the models for scheduling of meetings and workshops that were used in other Local Authorities.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the above amendment the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

39. SCHOOL RESERVES AS AT THE 31 MARCH 2015

The Finance Manager introduced a report to provide an analysis of the financial reserves held by schools in Flintshire as at 31 March 2015. She advised that the level of reserves held by Flintshire schools at the end of March 2015 had

increased compared with the reserves held in the previous financial year, however, she commented that in comparison to other authorities in Wales the overall balances were relatively modest.

The Finance Manager advised that an analysis of reserves for each school in Flintshire was appended to the report. She reported that Secondary school reserves had moved from a surplus balance to a deficit position and four secondary schools had negative reserves. Primary school reserves had increased. The Finance Manager explained that primary schools had reigned in spending in the final quarter of the financial year in response to concerns about future funding reductions. However, members were asked to note that based on current forecasts it was anticipated that the level of reserves would fall significantly in the current financial year.

In response to the questions and concerns raised by members the Finance Manager explained that in accordance with the Authority's policy, schools must provide a statement on how they intended to use any surplus balance above the limit allowed to be carried forward. The Authority also required a statement from schools as to the use that it proposed to make of a surplus in the school balance which exceeded the limits set. The Finance Manager advised that the Schools Accounting Team requested and scrutinised this information and commented that overall schools were good at submitting spending plans.

Responding to the further queries raised by members the Finance Manager outlined the procedure and rationale for allowing a deficit balance. She advised that Governing Bodies had no legal right to set a deficit budget without the consent of the Authority. Members were advised that there were three secondary schools forecasting deficits in 2015/16 and two licensed deficit agreements in place with a further agreement being negotiated. There were seven primary schools which had a deficit balance.

During discussion Officers responded to the queries and concerns expressed by members concerning deficit budget agreements. The Finance Manager explained that there would be a clear reason and understanding for a school having a deficit budget and robust plans put in place for recovery. If there was no prospect of recovery then immediate action was taken. The Chief Officer advised that the Authority had no power to write off the deficit balance of a school.

Councillor Nancy Matthews expressed concerns around the monitoring of schools at risk of reaching a deficit position. The Finance Manager explained that if a school was in a deficit position it would be included as an item for consideration at meetings of the School Performance Monitoring Group. She also advised that intensive support was provided to those schools where a licensed deficit arrangement was in place.

Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer asked what happened if there was a surplus balance in the school budget in the event that a school closed. Officers gave a verbal explanation and agreed to provide further information to the Committee in response to this question.

Mrs. Rebecca Stark commented on the difficult decisions to be made by Governing Bodies due to reduced funding levels and commented on the need for Governors to have the appropriate skills and information to address matters such as redundancy. She asked if the Authority could provide any additional help to schools in terms of assistance from Human Resources on such matters. The Chief Officer advised that an agreement was in place for temporary additional help to be provided to assist schools in such circumstances.

Officers responded to the further questions raised by members concerning funding per pupil and advised that the funding followed the pupil through their education.

RESOLVED:

That the school balances as at the 31 March 2015 be noted.

40. UPDATE FROM SCHOOL STANDARDS MONITORING GROUP

The Senior Manager School Improvement introduced a report to provide an annual update on the work of the School Standards Monitoring Group. She provided background information and expressed thanks to members for their support for the work of the SSMG.

The Senior Manager School Improvement referred to the key considerations and provided a summary of the position at the end of the academic year 2014-15. She explained that the key focus of the work undertaken by the SSMG was that schools were quickly identified, challenged, and appropriately supported if there were concerns about their performance which could adversely impact on outcomes for learners. This work had resulted in the Authority having to make limited use of formal powers of intervention.

Mr. David Hytch commented that the process was a positive experience for schools which had helped them to move forward. The Chief Officer reiterated that feedback from schools was “good”, that they had found the process positive and had been well supported throughout. He thanked members for the work undertaken around school monitoring which had improved the outcomes for schools and local communities also.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the work undertaken by the School Standards Monitoring Group be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee endorse the School Standards Monitoring Group to continue to work in the same way with targeted schools in 2015-16.

41. QUARTER 2 IMPROVEMENT PLAN MONITORING REPORT

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced the Quarter 2 Improvement Plan Monitoring report for consideration. The report presented the monitoring of progress for the second quarter of 2015/16 focussing on the areas

of under performance relevant to the Committee. Members were advised that detailed sub priority reports were appended to the report.

The Chairman invited members to raise questions.

Councillor Dave Mackie commented on the risk that the number of school places would not be sufficient to meet the future demands of changing times. The Chief Officer advised that the risk was in response to how the Authority managed school places to ensure there were no gaps in the future.

In response to the questions and concerns raised by members relating to school admissions the Chief Officer explained that the Authority was not allowed to direct pupils to alternative schools. Parents had to express a preference for the school where their child was educated. He also explained that the admissions form which is sent to parents details all schools and parents are asked to indicate a first and second preference.

Mr. David Hytch referred to the need to continue to support young people to access employment and training and that the earlier that issues are tackled the greater success of outcomes for those young people. He commended the Council on their work in this area. In response, the Chief Officer advised that Flintshire had the lowest level of young people 16+ not in education, employment or training in Wales and that the Council would continue to support the most vulnerable people in Flintshire to access employment and training opportunities.

Mr. Hytch also commented on the action for schools to work effectively with the Regional School Improvement Service (GwE) and raised concerns around the impact this could have on headteacher workloads. Councillor Nancy Matthews also expressed concerns that there was no additional funding provided to schools to pay for the cost of employing supply teachers when headteachers were visiting other schools to give support, and asked that the Chief Officer feed her concerns back to GwE. The Chief Officer advised that the School Improvement model was continuing to develop from feedback and evaluation from participants and therefore members could be confident that any similar feedback from the Committee would also be given proper consideration by GwE.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

42. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the forward work programme of the Committee. She advised that an additional meeting of the Committee would be held on 15 December 2015, to consider the budget proposals for 2016/17.

Following consideration of the Forward Work Programme it was agreed that a report on Early Entitlement be submitted to the meeting of the Committee to be held on 25 February 2016, and a report on the Welsh Education Strategic Plan be submitted to the meeting to be held on 24 March 2016.

Mrs. Rebecca Stark asked if a report on school governors could be submitted to a future meeting as she was concerned over the backlog of vacancies. It was agreed that a verbal update would be added to the agenda for the next meeting and that a written report would be presented to the Committee following the outcome of the national governance review.

Councillor Nancy Matthews suggested that the Council ask the Flintshire Local Voluntary Centre (FLVC) to advertise governor vacancies on their website. It was agreed that the Facilitator would contact the FLVC to pass this suggestion on. It was also agreed that that the Facilitator would circulate a revised Forward Work Programme to the Committee following the meeting, showing the dates for the special meetings to consider the outcome of the consultation on school organisation change and the additional items on the Forward Work Programme.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be noted.

43. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There was one member of the public and one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.15pm and ended at 3.42pm)

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Chairman