

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
24 SEPTEMBER 2020

Minutes of the meeting of the Education, Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Room, County Hall, Mold on Thursday 24th September 2020.

PRESENT: Councillor David Healey (Chair)

Janet Axworthy Sian Braun, Carol Ellis, Gladys Healey, Joe Johnson, Dave Mackie, Ian Smith, Martin White and David Williams

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Lynn Bartlett and David Hytch,

APOLOGY: Wendy White

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Patrick Heesom present as an observer

SUBSTITUTIONS: Councillors Sean Bibby (for Paul Cunningham) and Kevin Hughes (for Tudor Jones)

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Ian Roberts, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education; Chief Executive; Chief Officer (Education & Youth); Senior Manager – Business Change and Support; Senior Manager – Inclusion and Progression) and Senior Manager School Improvement Systems

IN ATTENDANCE:

Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Support Officer

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

The Facilitator advised that it had been confirmed at the Annual Meeting of the County Council that the Chair of the Committee should come from the Labour Group. The Committee was advised that Councillor David Healey had been appointed to this role for the municipal year.

RESOLVED:

That the appointment of Councillor David Healey as Chair of the Committee be noted.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

Councillor Martin White nominated Mr. David Hytch as Vice-Chair of the Committee and this was seconded by Mrs. Lynn Bartlett. There were no further nominations. On being put to the vote, this was carried.

RESOLVED:

That Mr. David Hytch be appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the 30th January 2020 were received.

Matters arising

Page 3 - Mr David Hytch referred to his comment and asked that they be changed to read "Mr Hytch referred to the graph which he felt was open to misinterpretation"

Councillor Dave Mackie proposed that subject to the amendment listed above, the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED:

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

5. EMERGENCY SITUATION BRIEFING (Verbal)

The Chief Executive explained that the current situation was fluid. He and his Chief Officer colleagues would be ensuring that Members received short up to date verbal briefings at the start of meetings. He also commented that it may yet be necessary to reinstate the situational briefings which had been delivered to members during the first six months of the emergency'.

The Chair praised the Chief Executive and Officers of the Council for their hard work in very challenging circumstances.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal update be noted.

6. TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE COMMITTEE

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented the report to receive the revised terms of reference for the Committee as agreed by Council. At the Council's Annual Meeting, Chairs had been appointed to the five Overview & Scrutiny committees within the new structure with amended terms of reference. Changes to the remit of this Committee included the addition of Libraries Culture and Heritage (including Archives and Museums), Leisure Services (including leisure and sports centres, swimming pools and recreational facilities), Theatr Clwyd and Aura (including Holywell Leisure Centre and Cambrian Aquatics).

The recommendation was moved by David Hytch and seconded by Councillor Martin White.

RESOLVED:

That the terms of reference, as agreed by Council and appended to the report, be noted.

7. RECOVERY STRATEGY

The Chief Executive presented a report to provide the Committee with oversight of recovery planning for its portfolio areas as part of the strategy for the resumption of full democratic governance. Feedback from each of the Overview & Scrutiny committees on the risk registers, recovery priorities and revised performance indicator targets for their respective areas would be reported to Cabinet prior to publication of a full Recovery Strategy.

A presentation showing the handover from response to recovery covered the following points:

- Recommendations from Cabinet
- Objectives of the Recovery Strategy
- Response Objectives
- Examples of local achievements in Response
- Recovery - handover arrangements
- Regional and Local Recovery Structures
- Recovery Objectives - Services
- Recovery Activities
- Community Recovery
- Council Plan and Performance
- Democratic Governance of Recovery

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) gave a presentation on the risk register for the service portfolio which covered the following:

- Education & Youth Portfolio Risks
- Current Risks
- Recovery Risks
- Governance/Legal
- Workforce

The Chief Executive suggested that Members consider risks of ongoing concern and how best to report them to the Committee to inform the forward work programme. The Chief Officer and Senior Managers provided an overview of the immediate strategic priorities for recovery which were recommended for inclusion in the Recovery Strategy.

Councillor Dave Mackie thanked the Chief Executive, Chief Officer and Senior Officers for their comments and praised the way the authority had responded during the emergency situation. He commented on the targeted advice on safeguarding which had been provided to head teachers which had enabled them to maintain contact and relationships with families whilst the schools were closed to ensure referrals continued. He said that the risk around workforce absence would need continual monitoring to ensure minimal impact to

service delivery. A number of Members of the Committee spoke in support of Councillor Mackie's comments.

Speaking in support of Councillor Mackie's comments, David Hytch commended the efforts of the authority. He commented on the risk around secondary schools not being financially viable due to insufficient base funding and questioned whether the distribution formula was being re-examined. Whilst he supported this, he did not feel that this would sufficiently assist schools if the starting budget remained low. He also asked if the pay award for teachers would be fully funded by Welsh Government (WG) and raised concerns on the impact to school budgets if it is was not.

The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education reported that WG had committed to funding between 2-2.5% of the teachers' pay award. The total increase equated to additional funding of 3.1%, therefore the authority would need to fund the difference. There was concern around funding for the full effect of 3.1% for the 2021/22 financial year if additional funding was not provided by WG.

The Chief Executive reported that the non-teachers Green Book pay award was covered and there was provision within reserves for the extra amount for this year having budgeted on 2% and it came in at 2.75% which was around £800,000 in additional funding. Looking at those figures there may have to be some risk share in the remaining part of the teachers' uplift which we would have to share with schools.

The Chair commented on the additional costs incurred by schools because of the emergency situation and asked whether additional funding from WG was sufficient to meet their needs. The Chief Officer reported on the funding streams available to schools to claim for particular items of expenditure specific in supporting their response to the emergency situation. She also explained that additional funding had been provided for emotional health and well-being to increase counselling capacity which was key in learners successfully re-engaging in education. The Chief Executive explained the process in requesting additional funding from WG and the challenges made to eligibility. He advised that the authority had been successful in submitting funding claims which were supported by WG.

In response to a question around positive Coronavirus cases in schools, the Chief Officer confirmed there were less than 10 reported cases and no evidence of transmission within schools. The Chief Officer outlined the support provided to schools should a pupil receive a positive Coronavirus test and explained that best practice was shared between schools.

Councillor Gladys Healey asked what support was in place for children who were in hospital and how were young carers who looked after their parents being supported. The Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) explained that a child in hospital would receive an offer of education which was provided through the hospital system but funded by the authority. The education provision needed was tailored to each individual child's needs with home tuition provided for children who were recuperating at home. The Chief Officer explained that support for young carers was provided via the Integrated Youth Service and

provided information on the card scheme where young carers could discreetly let teachers and schools know if they were struggling. Schools had been mindful of this and at the beginning of the emergency situation resources had been provided to support young carers during this time

The Chair commended the support provided to young carers through social services but asked whether the risk to continue to support them should be included within both the Education & Youth portfolio and Social Services risk registers. The Chief Officer agreed to consider this with the Senior Management Team to assess whether this was a risk which should be included on our risk register or whether this was already being captured through the portfolios business as usual.

In response to a question around the number of child care providers, the Chief Officer explained that this had been carefully considered to establish whether this would pose a significant risk but reported that the WG had provided funding through the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme for the provision of emergency childcare for children under the age of 4 which many playgroups and nurseries had taken advantage of. As additional funding came to an end, WG had reinstated schemes such as The Early Entitlement Offer for Early Education and the 30 hours Childcare Offer which these businesses had been able to take advantage of. This had been monitored by the Childcare Team to establish if there had been a significant impact with some businesses failing to re-open. The Senior Manager (School Improvement Systems) confirmed this was being kept under review and that because of the strategies and support already in place with providers this had enabled them to be in a much stronger position.

Councillor David Williams raised concerns around direct payments and sought assurances that they were reaching the most vulnerable children within the County. The Chief Officer reported that WG had responded quickly to ensure that those families who received school meals were not greatly impacted during lockdown and had continued to receive that support. Discussion had been held with WG to ensure that direct payments continued until schools returned fully on the 14th September. The Revenues and Benefits team had identified families entitled to this support through the applications for benefits and it had enabled payments to be made directly into the bank accounts of those families.

The Leader of the Council praised WG for their support for families who received free school meals and their priority to continue to support vulnerable learners.

Councillor Ian Smith asked how many learners had experienced difficulties in engaging or accessing remote learning. The Chief Officer reported that during the beginning of the emergency situation work was undertaken to identify those learners who did not have access to digital devices. Resources from the Hub Infrastructure Project were repurposed for those learners and MiFi devices were provided which enabled them to access online learning. The Senior Manager (School Improvement Systems) explained that GwE were supporting schools to ensure they had appropriate materials and resources to support learners for any circumstance where they needed to work from home. Work on resilience and support for smaller schools and sharing resources was also progressing.

The Chief Officer thanked the Senior Management Team who had worked extremely hard to support schools and childcare settings through this difficult time. She also extended her thanks to schools explaining the work carried out by Head Teachers to support pupils in continuing to deliver the curriculum and commented on their enthusiasm to having learners back in a classroom setting. The Leader also wished to add his thanks to all involved in supporting learners during the emergency situation and reported that over the last three weeks, 23,000 children had returned to classroom settings across the County, with an approximate attendance rate of 86%. He thanked the Chief Officer for her leadership and dedication during the difficult and challenging time.

The Chair sought a proposal to support the recommendations outlined within the report and suggested an additional recommendation – That the Committee commends the portfolio team in dealing with the emergency response and its work towards future priorities which include young people who were homeless and child poverty. This recommendation, together with the recommendations outlined within the report were proposed by Councillor Janet Axworthy and seconded by David Hytch.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee commends the portfolio team in dealing with the emergency response and its work towards future priorities which include young people who were homeless and child poverty;
- (b) That the full set of immediate strategic priorities for recovery of the portfolio, as set out in the report be agreed, together with the risk analysis and mitigation actions both live and planned; and
- (c) That a forward work programme for the Committee be rebuilt for the remainder of the 2020/21 Council year with recovery planning at its core.

8. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 3.51 pm)

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Chairman