

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
30 NOVEMBER 2023

Minutes of the hybrid meeting of the Education, Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Thursday 30 November 2023.

PRESENT: Councillor Teresa Carberry (Chair)

Councillors: Bill Crease, Gladys Healey, Dave Mackie, Gina Maddison, Andrew Parkhurst, Carolyn Preece, David Richardson, Jason Shallcross and Arnold Woolley

CO-OPTEEES: Lisa Allen, Lynne Bartlett and Wendy White

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors: Bernie Attridge and Chrissy Gee attended as observers

APOLOGIES:

Councillors: Paul Cunningham, Ryan McKeown and Ian Roberts.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Councillor Mared Eastwood (Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure); Councillor Christine Jones (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Social Services and Wellbeing); Councillor Dave Hughes (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Streetscene and the Regional Transport Strategy); Councillor Paul Johnson (Cabinet Member for Finance, Inclusion, Resilient Communities including Social Value and Procurement); Chief Officer (Education & Youth); Senior Manager (School Place Planning and Provision) and Senior Manager (Business Support Services)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officers

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

No declarations were received.

35. MINUTES

14 September 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on the 14 September 2023 were presented for approval.

The minutes of the meeting were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillors Bill Crease and Carolyn Preece.

19 October 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on the 19 October 2023 were presented for approval.

The minutes of the meeting were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillor Dave Mackie and Mrs Lynne Bartlett.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 14 September and 19 October 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

36. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

In presenting the report, the Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator outlined the items listed on the Forward Work Programme which was attached at Appendix 1 and referred to the Youth Justice Peer Review which had been moved to the February meeting.

Referring to the Action Tracking report at Appendix 2 it was confirmed that the majority of the actions from the last meeting were completed. The Out of County report had been included on the Forward Work Programme for the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee with a request for a Workshop on Out of County Placements for new Members passed to the Democratic Services Manager. An update was provided on the request for a report on Retention and Recruitment.

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) suggested that the purpose for the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Wales Act item listed for the Joint Scrutiny meeting on 27 June be amended to reflect a whole overview of pre and post 16 Education.

Councillor Andrew Parkhurst asked why the "Tackling the Impact of Inequality on Education Outcomes" was still listed as an item to be scheduled. The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator agreed to take this as an action from the meeting to ensure that it was allocated to a meeting date.

Councillor David Mackie referred to his request at the last meeting for a list of professional learning courses offered by GwE and to the document which he had received saying that it was difficult to understand. The information that he had requested had been around:-

- What training was being offered to teachers in Flintshire;
- What training was being devised;
- What was the purpose of the training;
- How many people were expected to attend the training.

Councillor Mackie referred to the training information provided by GwE and felt that it would be helpful if more detail was included around what courses and training opportunities were made available for schools. He believed that a better understanding could then be made if an analysis of training in Flintshire schools could be compared with other Counties.

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) advised that the appendix that the Senior Manager (School Improvement) had sent Councillor Mackie was provided by GwE and outlined all of the professional training and support provided to Flintshire schools. It was also confirmed that a meeting had been arranged between Councillor Mackie, the Senior Manager (School Improvement) and Officers from GwE to enable a better understanding of the information that was being requested.

Councillor Mackie referred to the action from the last meeting which related to a report on demography and asked why it was not showing in the items to be scheduled. The Chief Officer explained that the information on the impacts of pupil demography would be included in budget reports however if Members required more information on this then a workshop could be arranged. Councillor Mackie wondered if a regular update report could be provided, similar to the information provided around school balances, as he felt it would be helpful. This was agreed by the Chief Officer.

Councillor Parkhurst referred to the condition grades within schools and to the information provided and asked as the data was collected in 2016/17 and this was re-assessed on a 5-year cycle, were there more schools now placed in Category C. In response the Senior Manager (School Place Planning and Provision) explained that information provided related to a point in time and that some improvements had been undertaken with the situations of some buildings improving. There was a delay because of Covid but the portfolio's technical team, together with the support of an external consultancy team commissioned by Welsh Government, were due to commence a full-scale review of the school network to enable up to date condition information to be provided.

Councillor Carolyn Preece asked if information on the new Inspection Framework from Estyn for Schools could be provided to the Committee as either a workshop for all members or a report to a future meeting. This was agreed.

In response to questions on the budget and a request for portfolio information to be included moving forward from Councillor Parkhurst, the Chief Officer agreed with the comments made saying that previously the portfolio budget figures had been included. A detailed overview was provided with regard to budget pressures, the use of grant funding and the risks for the portfolio. She added no officer suggestions were included as there was nowhere left to go to find savings and that the budgets were supporting statutory services for children and young people with no flexibility.

In response to questions on Out of County Placements and Residential Care Costs from Councillor Parkhurst, the Chief Officer explained that it was the objective of the portfolio to maintain as many learners as possible in their local schools and communities. The Senior Manager (School Inclusion) would be able to provide more detail when the Annual Report was presented to the Joint Committee meeting in June. The Chief Officer referred to the funding which was delegated to schools to support children who had identified with additional learning needs and the work undertaken by the Moderation Panel when determining whether a young person's needs were beyond the remit of the

school. The funding was insufficient to support the growing number of young people presenting with complex needs and an overview of the rigorous processes around the allocation of that funding in consultation with Head Teachers was given. The Specialist provision was available in schools to assist children with needs such as speech, language and moderate learning difficulties. There were, however, a number of children where the support of an external provider was required but the market was limited with the providers holding all the cards and setting the rates. It was explained that the authority could become embroiled in a bidding war when there were so few places available, which came with significant costs for education and residential care. Welsh Government were implementing a policy where the provision of these places should be on a not-for-profit basis which had implications for provisions in Wales. The portfolio did what it could with the resources available.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services agreed saying that the out of county budget was challenging with the market very competitive when trying to place a child with an appropriate provider. This was a challenge for all authorities in Wales in a very competitive market.

Councillor Dave Mackie felt there was currently a budget pressure for the revenue funding for an extra 20 places in special provision and it could be argued that the question asked by Councillor Parkhurst was in the process of being satisfied as this provision was already built and that the money added into the budget was for the staff to run that provision. He asked if the out of county budget was moved to the Council's own provision would it be possible to get a better return on the money. Councillor Parkhurst confirmed that the amount was so great but the needs of the children should not be lost sight of. This was about spending the money in the best way to look after the children but also to get the best value for our residents.

The Chief Officer confirmed that this was what the Portfolios were trying to achieve, and she referred to reports taken to the joint Committee which outlined a range of strategies to increase the Council's in house provision. She referred to the work undertaken by Children's Services, the new Children's home facilities, the increased capacity at the specialist primary school and enhancing the resource provision, which had been achieved at Flint High School and the Pupil Referral Unit. The Portfolios were constantly looking at ways to get better value for money by delivering that provision in house, using grant funding from WG when available, to expand that provision to support more children locally. Information was provided on the rigorous monitoring process around the out of county budget with monthly meetings held which included the Principal Accountants, herself and the Chief Officer for Social Services, the Senior Manager (Children's Services), the Senior Manager (Inclusion & Progression). An overview of the report provided by the Principal Accountant was given and it was confirmed that he also attended the moderation meetings held by the multi-agency professionals and that he tracked every individual learner. This information fed into the monthly budget monitoring reports.

Councillor Bill Crease felt that everyone wanted the best outcomes for these young people, but the problem was the Authority had to compete in an imperfect market. He felt that the only way to achieve this was to compete and

it was very important that time, effort and money was committed to ensuring the provision was available in Flintshire.

Councillor Gladys Healey agreed with all the comments and hoped that Flintshire was able to establish its own provision and called on Welsh Government to provide the resources to enable the Council to do this.

The Chair agreed saying that there was a general consensus that we wanted our children to remain in Flintshire but that this was not possible at this time.

The Chief Officer referred to the Moderation Panel saying that it was a significant multi agency Panel with representatives from every department in Education, Health and the Finance Team. Every case was looked at in detail with a significant amount of evidence which had to be submitted and reviewed to ensure the process was applied equitably and consistently when difficult decisions had to be made. She reassured members that the Panel were constantly trying to be creative using grant funding wherever possible, utilising resource provision and planning for the next round of Sustainable Learning Communities Funding. She referred to the WG funding for schools and explained the two specialist schools in Flintshire were full and she was heartened to hear the comments today around supporting children locally. Because of the currently financial situation every programme that was proposed came with a cost pressure to the Council because of the levels of intervention rates from WG. It was how this could be done as efficiently, effectively and what could be delivered locally.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved by Councillor Carolyn Preece and seconded by Councillor Dave Mackie.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be noted;
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises; and
- (c) That the progress made in completing the outstanding actions be noted.

37. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FOR LEARNING UPDATE

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) introduced Jennie Williams, the Senior Manager, (School Planning and Provision) to committee and outlined the areas of work which she covered.

In presenting the report the Senior Manager (School Planning and Provision) highlighted the progress which had been made with regard to the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, previously referred to as the School Modernisation Programme. The last update was presented to committee in February 2022 and this report highlighted the progress made in a number of

areas and included information on the challenges and pressures which were being faced. The Senior Manager provided information on the grant funding which had been made available and the small team which were tasked to deliver this. She then highlighted some key points within the report and provided an update on the Childcare Programme and the Ysgol Croes Atti site which would be the second net zero carbon school and first new build Welsh Medium school. An update on the 3 to 16 Campus at Mynydd Isa was provided which included information on the excellent social value team and the impacts it was making within the community and wider school network. The Senior Manager confirmed that the portfolio had executed the statutory proposals to increase capacity in Drury and Penyffordd which were completed in December 2022 and that the next stage of extensions and refurbishment had commenced. Information was then provided on the engagement process for the Saltney and Broughton Area Review which had been completed and would be presented to Cabinet. The Senior Manager then provided an update on the Universal Primary Free School Meals Grant which was progressing well and this had enabled some resource and refurbishment changes to be made in primary schools. Referring to Additional Learning Needs (ALN), the Senior Manager confirmed that capital grant funding of £2m had been received and it was confirmed that some money had been directed to the shared Hydro Pool used by the Special Schools and other learners. Work was being undertaken to increase the capacity for learners who required ALN support. The Senior Manager confirmed that the service had accessed the Community Facility Grant and Sports Wales Grants which had enabled works to be undertaken on school sites to support community access of those facilities.

Councillor Bill Crease referred to the Saltney Broughton Area Review and St David's High School and raised a number of questions around the public consultation, the condition survey and funding for maintenance at the school. He also asked if any Senior Officers or Members had attended the school this year to see what was happening there.

In response, the Senior Manager recognised that this review had taken some time to progress as there were complex circumstances around the school site and flooding in this area. An update would be provided to Cabinet and the Committee with regard to the outcomes of the engagement process. She explained that she and other officers had visited the school as there had been some significant repairs and maintenance issues which were not flagged with the authority until fairly recently. As soon as the team were made aware they had visited and enabled some significant investment to be made to resolve them and improve the heating issues at the school. There were concerns with regard to demographics with learners bypassing the school with a range of responses received around why this was happening. The information would need to be considered when a decision was made as to what was best for the area.

Councillor Crease said the flooding issues were not a concern when the previous proposed plans to build on the site were made. Referring to demographics, he understood the numbers were increasing in the school and that the Local Development Plan was enabling a significant amount of house building within 2 or 3 miles of the school. In response, the Senior Manager explained technical work had been undertaken with regard to TAN 15 which confirmed that the flooding as a result of global warming had ramped up changes

in areas which would have been developed previously. This included Saltney and limited the potential options for the area. Consideration had been given to demographics and birth rate information from 2020 which posed a significant drop which would flow through the school systems. There were sufficient learners in the Saltney area which could make the school sustainable but currently the numbers were not where they needed to be. This was a concern.

Councillor Dave Mackie referred to the issues of flooding saying that there were very few areas in Flintshire which were not affected by it and that it was the view of the Planning department that these sites had to be built on at some stage. He said the previous discussions and delays concerning Saltney had resulted in the money being moved to the Mynydd Isa site. With regard to the consultation with local residents he assumed that prior to the previous development around the Saltney site, that a public consultation was undertaken. He asked what the outcome of that consultation had been and presumed the outcome enabled the progression of the Saltney development to where a site was allocated. He also referred to the Holywell High School development where one of the arguments was that a high school was needed in that area. There were similar issues with regard to pupil demographics at that site and he reported on a conversation with the Chief Education Officer at the time who said that the new school could just be the answer that parents needed. Referring to local developments at the Airfields and the two developments within Hawarden, there could be a situation when the current LDP ends in 2035 that 300 high school places could be required in that part of the county. He understood the school allocation policy allowed for the catchment areas to move depending upon demand and this was a pressure within the Hawarden area.

In response the Senior Manager commented that forecasting on demographics was difficult and reported on the areas in Penyffordd and Hawarden which were being monitored. In Hawarden it was explained that cohorts were coming into the school even though it was not in their catchment area. The situation was continually monitored especially around the shifts and PLASC (the electronic collection of pupil and school level data provided by all maintained sector primary, middle, secondary, nursery and special schools) data.

Councillor Mackie referred to the Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) rollout and understood that some schools were having difficulties because children were not eating their meals quickly enough to enable another group to have their meals. The Senior Manager reported on the audits carried out in schools with regard to their kitchen facilities and it was recognised that this did have impacts on some schools in terms of sittings. A survey was undertaken with parents, carers, learners and schools to assess the impact and ascertain if there were significant problems. She was not aware of any issues but would like to speak to Councillor Mackie outside of the meeting to get more information to enable this to be investigated. The roll out had been successful for learners to have this meal within the primary sector.

Councillor Mackie also referred to the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) saying that one of the problems which had been highlighted was that the two schemes were running alongside each other which had confused parents. He asked if Welsh Government (WG) were aware of these issues and the impacts that the new curriculum, budget pressures and ALN were having on schools with

them all coming in at the same time. In response the Chief Officer commented that this particular report referred only to the Capital Programme which included some provision for Additional Learning Needs provision, not the changes to ALN legislation which Cllr Mackie was referring to. She explained that members would receive an update on the challenges of the implementation of the new ALN legislation, and the two systems being referred to by Cllr Mackie in the ALN report which would be presented at the joint committee in June. She was proud of the way that the team had supported schools with legal and complex matters which were new for everyone including officer teams. There had been a joint effort with Head Teachers and Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators to prepare schools for the implementation. She explained that she was Chair of the National Group of Education Directors, and the Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) was the Vice Chair of the National Implementation Group for ALN. Concerns were raised with Welsh Government around the pace of change and the number of initiatives that schools had to manage and through conversations with other authorities she felt that Flintshire had done incredibly well supporting schools and that they had received a positive response from Estyn's Local Area Link Inspector with regard to this.

Councillor Jason Shallcross reflected on his time as a pupil at St David's School and said that parents had the choice on whether to send their child to Hawarden and the two high schools across the border. He said that looking forward as there were no future plans to build in Saltney or Broughton and when he talked to residents, he told them that if the school was not used it would be lost.

In response to further comments by Councillor Crease, the Chief Officer confirmed that they were working through options and the purpose of this early informal engagement process with the school and local community in Saltney was to have that discussion as everyone wanted the best outcome for all learners and to find a sustainable affordable model. Once the responses had been received and collated, they would be reported to the Committee with public information being made available shortly as Welsh Government were expecting the authority to outline its priorities for the next phase of the Sustainable Learning Communities by March 2024.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, were moved by Councillor Bill Crease and seconded by Councillor Jason Shallcross.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the contents of the report and progress of the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme.

38. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 3.37 pm)

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Chair