

LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
14 FEBRUARY 2013

Minutes of the Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Mold on Thursday 14 February 2013.

PRESENT: **Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)**

Councillors M. Bateman, A. Bragg, I.A. Dunbar, R. Hampson, S. Jones, C. Legg, P. Lightfoot, D.I. Mackie, N.M. Matthews , P. Shotton , N. Steele-Mortimer, C.A. Thomas.

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Mr D. Hytch, Mrs C. Burgess

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor P. Macfarlane

APOLOGIES: Councillor C. Bithell, Mrs R. Stark

CONTRIBUTORS: Director of Lifelong Learning, Secondary Schools Officer, Healthy Schools Officer

IN ATTENDANCE: Learning and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

49. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

The Chairman advised Members of the need to declare a personal interest in school related items on the agenda if they were school or college governors. All Members present except Councillors R.G. Hampson, P.Shotton I.A. Dunbar, A. Bragg and P.R. Lightfoot (who were not school governors) declared an interest as school governors.

50. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10 January 2013 were submitted.

Accuracy

Mr D Hytch said that on page 5, paragraph 2, his concern was not about the effects of recent school amalgamations on the budget, but the annual reduction of the budget.

Councillor N. Steele-Mortimer said that the final paragraph of page 1 was not clear. The Learning and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator advised that the letter that was referred to was the one sent in December 2012.

Matters Arising

Councillor P. Shotton asked that thanks be conveyed via the Director to the officers who arranged the recent full page newspaper promotion for the Afon Spa.

Councillor I.A. Dunbar reported favourable feedback about the “Bogstandard” website by a local school and that their toilet facilities would be updated in the next quarter. The Director of Lifelong Learning said that this would continue to be a priority in the capital programme.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be received, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the above changes being implemented.

51. INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed Officers from the Wales Audit Office (WAO) and the Peer Learning Exchange Team from Wrexham County Council to the meeting who attended as part of the WAO Scrutiny Improvement Study.

52. PUPIL ATTAINMENT 2011-12

The Director of Lifelong Learning introduced the report which gave a summary of pupil attainment in statutory assessments across the primary and secondary school phases for the school year 2011-12.

The following key points of the report were highlighted:

- Permanent exclusions were low.
- Progress was being made with fixed term exclusions
- Attendance in secondary schools still high
- Attendance for primary schools had improved over the last two years and is now amongst top performing counties.
- Pupil outcomes were above expectations at KS4
- Pupil outcomes were broadly in line with expectations at KS3.
- The number of primary schools causing concern in accordance with Flintshire criteria had decreased from 15 down to 11.

The Secondary Schools Officer gave a detailed report on the secondary performance and was pleased to report that outcomes remained very good at KS4 in the main quality indicator which measured the proportion of learners who achieved 5 or more GCSE passes at A* to C including Maths, English/Welsh 1st Language.

The Chair thanked the members who had contributed to the work of the school monitoring group.

Councillor P. Shotton thanked the officers for the thorough report. He acknowledged the challenges faced in Foundation and Key Stage 2, particularly those from deprived areas and asked if any activities had been arranged for World Book Day on 7 March to promote literacy. The Director of Lifelong Learning said that children in the foundation stage should have the best possible start to their school career and that in the previous year, 100 of the most vulnerable families had received support from Families First and this was making a real difference in terms of attendance, attitudes to learning and behaviour. He said that World Book Day would be celebrated in schools and in libraries.

Councillor C. A. Thomas voiced concern at the apparent lack of boundaries within the Foundation Phase, how consistently the phase had been implemented and how pupils coped upon entry into the more structured Key Stage 2 in year 3. She asked at which stage would early intervention be implemented, asked for more information about school attendance figures and asked if there were plans to assess and band primary schools. She asked about testing for ages 5-15 from September. The Director of Lifelong Learning in response said that there had been a 0.3% downturn in primary attendance, partly attributable to schools that were kept open during a spell of bad weather. This has been followed by two years of improved primary attendance with relative primary performance now in line or above expectations. He added that Flintshire had a good attendance management practices which involved the inclusion and welfare service and multi agency interventions where appropriate. With regards to testing, assessments would be more rigorous, concentrating on literacy and numeracy. In terms of banding for primaries, there would be performance profiles for primaries. The Director of Lifelong Learning said that had there had been concerns about how Foundation Phase had been implemented in some schools. In these cases, there had been relevant training and development for staff put in place. With regards to intervention, assessments were made regarding developmental progress throughout the foundation phase.

Mr Hytch thanked officers for the report. He said that the banding mechanism for secondary schools may be flawed, but that a mechanism was needed to prompt under performing schools into action. He agreed that it was important to focus on testing of literacy and numeracy as poor skills in these areas would cause difficulties in other subjects. He welcomed the results on page 37 that proved that other subjects fared well in addition to English, Maths and Science.

Councillor M. Bateman said that she had concerns about Foundation Phase and wanted proof of more rigorous assessment. She added that Flintshire had been underperforming in primary for some time and asked for reasons why Flintshire pupils were underperforming in entrance assessments. The Director of Lifelong Learning said that there were a variety of reasons and that it was not possible to isolate a single general factor. Examples included parents and families who required support and schools with children who spoke English as an additional language. He also noted that assessments were not consistently applied within every school.

Councillor N. M. Matthews said that parents if entitled to free school meals should take up the offer as it affected pupil premium payments and performance statistics. She also asked about what could be done to stop parents taking children out of school to go on holiday. The Director of Lifelong Learning said that schools tried to discourage holidays during term time and that Flintshire recognised the importance of attendance and wanted to get 100% attendance in all of its schools. He said that there would be no movement away from national free school meals indicators and eligible parents should be encouraged to take up the offer. He added that Flintshire were not just focussing on pupils with free school meals, but also pupils with high level additional needs, English as an additional language and traveller children.

Councillor N. Steele-Mortimer asked about numbers of children who arrived at secondary school in need of additional help with numeracy and literacy. The Secondary phase officer said that some outcomes were below levels expected. A new initiative had been introduced whereby 12 outstanding KS2 literacy and numeracy teachers would share good practice with other teachers.

Councillor C. Legg asked if problems were caused by low standards in Primary Teacher Training Colleges. He said that he was sorry that Latin was not on the curriculum in Wales as it could help with lots of other subjects. He was disappointed to see Flintshire 18th in the performance tables for Welsh as a first language. He said that many demands on Year 6 Key Stage 2 teachers such as moderation, portfolios and standardisation and recognise the lack of resources at KS2. He hoped that the formula funding review may address this. The Director of Lifelong Learning said that successful schools offered a good teaching and learning, high quality leadership and good governance. He did not think initial teacher training should be solely responsible for quality of teaching, but that it was important to consider professional development opportunities at every stage of a teacher's career.

RESOLVED

- (a) That members receive the report and note the attainment of Flintshire pupils for the year 2011-12.
- (b) That members receive a future report on analysis of learner progress from entry assessment and successful strategies for securing improved learner progression.

53. QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT ON PROGRESS WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ESTYN ACTION PLAN

The Director of Lifelong Learning introduced the report to consider the progress made with implementation of the Action Plan following the 2011 Estyn Inspection of Local Authority Education Services for Children and Young People.

The Director of Lifelong Learning highlighted the progress made in relation to key school organisation decisions such as the recent primary and junior school amalgamations, the closure of the smallest primary school and the options for secondary school re-organisation.

Councillor D.I. Mackie asked the Director of Lifelong Learning if the proposals for post -16 education provision had been favourably received. The Director of Lifelong Learning in response said that he was not aware of any issues. He advised that at the next Cabinet meeting there would be discussion about the consultation process for Saltney and Flint post-16 education provision.

Councillor D. I. Mackie said that the appendices were difficult to read and at 100% they did not fit upon a single screen page. He asked if this could be addressed.

The Leader of the Council welcomed the monitoring report which he said was very positive and that it was essential that Estyn saw that the council was making good progress.

Councillor A. Bragg asked how poor school attendance would be addressed and at what stage intervention occurred. The Director of Lifelong Learning said that various types of interventions were available from school inclusion welfare officers, to Families First and multi agency support. He said that patterns of absence or extended absence would be referred to Inclusion Welfare.

Councillor I. A. Dunbar asked how the achievement gap between girls' performance and boys' performance in schools would be addressed and if there were any initiatives for pupils who had lost interest in traditional school subjects. The Secondary Phase Officer said that although girls in Flintshire secondary schools outperformed boys, the gap was getting smaller. There was a variety of curriculum areas such as the learning route into engineering in conjunction with Deeside College which was available for year 10 students, some of which had gone on to study maths, physics or engineering. Other vocational courses were now offered in schools through the 14-19 network.

RESOLVED

That members consider progress with implementation of the Estyn Action Plan and accept the report.

54. HEALTHY SCHOOLS

The Healthy Schools Officer provided an update on recent developments within Flintshire Schools in relation to the Healthy Schools Scheme.

The Welsh Government launched Healthy Schools in 2010 which was a national framework, from pre-school to secondary school to encourage healthy lifestyle choices. All schools in Flintshire have now signed up to the initiative as well as 13 pre-school settings.

It is expected that by summer 2013, 50 Flintshire schools would be awarded Healthy school status.

Councillor P. Shotton asked if all beef products for consumption within schools had been checked in the light of current concerns about the quality of meat products. Councillor Shotton also asked if healthy foods were stocked in school vending machines. The Director of Lifelong Learning said that the procurement department had ran checks with the supply chain and that there was no evidence to suggest that beef products contained any other meat other than beef. He said that the council would continue to monitor the supply chain. The Healthy Schools Officer said that she would be conducting an audit of all secondary school vending machines and noting all non compliant items. She accepted that schools may resist controls as long as possible as they gained financially from the use of vending machines. She said that the most unhealthy items would be removed first such as energy drinks and sweets and that schools should start to run down stocks from Easter onwards and explain to pupils and parents that this was a national decision.

Councillor S. Jones said that there was a danger that vending machines stocked with healthy food only would be rejected by pupils and that there should be more cookery lessons in school to promote healthy eating. The Secondary Phase Officer said that food technology was a compulsory subject at Key Stage 3 and the Healthy Schools Officer said that food technology formed part of the Key Stage 2 curriculum.

Councillor M. Bateman said that the quality of school meals in her local schools was exemplary, but asked if schools could use separate plates for main courses and second courses rather than the two in one tray in use in many schools. The Healthy Schools Officer said that there could be cost implications in using two plates, but that a neighbouring council had implemented this so she would look into the matter.

Councillor N. M. Matthews said that vending machines provided funding for schools and that parents also had a responsibility to encourage healthy eating. The Director of Education said that it was all about a balance of personal, family and school responsibility.

The Healthy Schools Officer encouraged the committee to access the Appetite for Life web site which was currently seeking public consultation about healthy choices.

Mr D. Hytch said that if pupils were kept on site at lunch times that this would minimise unhealthy food choices. He expressed concern at a forthcoming planning application for a retail outlet which would be very close

to a Flintshire secondary school. The Chair suggested that the Board of Governors consult local planning policy and made their concerns known to the Council. The Healthy Schools Officer said that Wrexham Borough Council had established a planning measure which forbid the approval of fast food/retail establishments within a 100 metre radius of schools.

RESOLVED:

That members note the report and contents.

55. INCIDENTS OF ARSON, VANDALISM AND BURGLARIES IN FLINTSHIRE SCHOOLS

The Director for Lifelong Learning introduced a report to update members on the measures taken to reduce and/or prevent arson, vandalism and burglaries to Flintshire schools. He noted that there had been a reduction in incidents and costs and minimal disruption as a result.

The Leader of the Council said that the OWL messaging had assisted in the reduction of crime and urged all members to sign up to the scheme if they had not already done so. He added that funding for the scheme from the Home Office was under review and asked that members lobbied the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) to retain the service.

Councillor A. Bragg said that she had already spoken to the PCC and he was very keen to retain the service and to reintroduce Farm Watch Scheme. She added that the Police and Crime Commissioner had been invited to attend the full Council meeting and Community and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March.

Councillor S. Jones asked if the WLGA could write to the North Wales counties in the west to see if they wished to join the OWL scheme. The Leader of the Council said that the western counties had their own schemes.

RESOLVED:

That members note developments so far and receive a report in 12 months time.

56. SALTNEY LIBRARY UPDATE

The Director of Lifelong Learning introduced the report to update members on work to provide a permanent library in Saltney.

- A temporary facility was currently in operation for 14 hours per week
- In August 2009 the Council entered into a section 106 agreement with Morrisons Supermarkets which involved the transfer of a parcel of land adjacent to the new super store to Flintshire County Council
- The parcel of land was to be used to accommodate a new library.
- The agreement stipulated a 7 year timescale for the agreement.

- A steering group was set up to investigate the provision of a multi use building on the site.
- A feasibility study commissioned by the group found that initial costs for such a building ranged from £1.1m to £2m
- Insufficient funding was in place at the time and it was decided that an options appraisal be undertaken.
- The options appraisal report would be available in April 2013.

Councillor V. Gay, the local member was invited by the Chair to speak about the condition of the section 106 agreement land at Saltney. She said that the Section 106 agreement had been a flawed negotiation and that Planning should have known about the existence of a large water pipe that ran across the site. She claimed that had the steering group been aware of this, that they would not have entered into the agreement. She added that the timescale was not realistic and that no progress had been made with the project. She summed up by asking that members voted not to accept the report and to reject the site outright as a possible replacement for the Saltney library.

The Leader of the Council said that the Council was still committed to providing a library service in Saltney

The Chair said that he was concerned about the original land exchange and the suitability of the plot. He suggested that the matter be considered again at the Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 25 April 2013 after the release of the Options Appraisal Report.

Councillor S. Jones said that she agreed with the Chair's proposal.

The Director of Lifelong Learning said that the options appraisal would look at other potential sites in the town and if capital funds were needed these would need to be addressed in the Capital Programme.

The proposal by Councillor V. Gay to delete the section 106 land from the list of possible sites was rejected by the committee.

The Chair proposed that the matter be placed on the Forward Work Plan as an agenda item for the Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 25 April 2013. This proposal was agreed by the committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Saltney Library and the Options Appraisal Report be discussed at the meeting on 25 April 2013.
- (b) That members recognise that the section 106 site at Saltney may not be a viable option, subject to the publication of the Options Appraisal Report.

57. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Learning and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the Forward Work Programme of the Committee. She advised that the next meeting would be held on 14 March 2013. An additional joint meeting with Social Care and Health would take place on 21 March 2013 to discuss Educational Attainment of Looked After Children, Young People Partnership, Corporate Parenting Activity Update, Local Safeguarding Children Update and Families First and Young Carers.

An update on Saltney Library would now be added to the 25 April 2013 agenda as a result of this meeting.

Councillor N. M. Matthews asked that the school meals service, menus and working practices be added to the Forward Work Programme along with School Modernisation and Post 16 Education.

Councillor C. A. Thomas referred to items referred by Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny by the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Learning and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator advised that they would be covered within the Quarterly reports and that the new Section 106 Policy would be included. Councillor Thomas also asked that the Play Sufficiency Survey results be included in a future meeting.

Mr D. Hytch said that it may be helpful if the function of the committee be examined to establish effective working practices. He said that he found it difficult to read and scrutinise lengthy reports which contained too much information and found it equally difficult to scrutinise short reports which did not contain enough detail. The Learning and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator agreed that self evaluation be added to the Forward Work Programme.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be agreed subject to the above additions.

58. DURATION OF THE MEETING

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.46 pm.

59. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There was one member of the press in attendance.

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Chairman