

EDUCATION & YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY 18TH JANUARY 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Mold, Flintshire on Thursday, 18 January, 2018

PRESENT: David Healey (Chairman)

Councillors: Janet Axworthy, Geoff Collett, Paul Cunningham, Andy Dunbobbin, Veronica Gay, Patrick Heesom, Dave Hughes, Kevin Hughes, Tudor Jones, Dave Mackie, Ian Smith, Martin White and David Williams

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: David Hytch and Rebecca Stark

APOLOGIES: Lynn Bartlett, Bernard Stuart

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Aaron Shotton, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance; Councillor Ian Roberts, Cabinet Member for Education; Chief Executive; Interim Chief Officer (Education and Youth); Senior Manager School Planning and Provision and Finance Manager (Education & Youth)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Education & Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Support Officer

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Paul Cunningham asked the Chair if Declarations of Interest were required from Members who were school governors. It was confirmed that there was not a conflict of interest and that Members' declarations of interest in this regard had already been registered.

33. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 November 2017 had been circulated to Members with the agenda.

Matters arising

On page 6 of the minutes, Councillor Mackie asked if the Facilitator had forwarded the concerns of the Committee to the Performance Team around the formatting of reports and whether training could be provided to Members in order for them to gain a better understanding of performance reports. The Facilitator confirmed that the concerns had been forwarded and that a request had been made for training to be added to the Member Training Programme.

In response to a question from Councillor Mackie on his query around 'the percentage of young people aged 16 – 18 in the youth justice system offered education, training or employment' within the performance report, the Facilitator agreed to chase a response.

Following a comment from Councillor Heesom around the lack of Youth Services in the west of the County and a question on a report being submitted to a future meeting of the Committee, the Interim Chief Officer (Education & Youth) confirmed that the following two reports would be submitted to the 12 April, 2018 Committee meeting:-

- Youth Council – *to provide an update on progress*
- Integrated Youth Services – *to provide a detailed update on overall provision of Integrated Youth Services*

The Interim Chief Officer (Education & Youth) thanked Councillor Kevin Hughes for preparing the recent press article around social media and internet safety in schools which had assisted in raising the profile of support being provided by the Council to children, young people and teachers.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

34. SCHOOL BALANCES

The Finance Manager (Education & Youth) introduced the report which provided an analysis of reserve balances for each school in Flintshire as at the end of March 2017 and the overall reserve balances held by schools at the end of the 2016/17 financial year compared with the previous year.

In Flintshire, secondary school budgets continued to be under pressure with seven secondary schools showing deficits at the end of the financial year. Forecasts for the current financial year show that the situation would worsen with potentially more schools slipping into deficit and the overall level of secondary school deficits increasing.

In accordance with the Council's policy, schools must provide a statement on how they intended to use any surplus over the £50,000 for primary schools and over £100,000 for secondary schools and specialist schools. The Schools Accounting Team requested and scrutinised this particular information.

In conclusion, the Finance Manager (Education & Youth) advised that Governors had no legal right to set a deficit budget without the consent of the Council and should not presume such consent would be granted. However, the Council would consider approving a licensed deficit to a school where it agreed that there were circumstances in which it would be unreasonable for that school to balance its budget in the current financial year.

Mrs. Rebecca Stark commented on the worsening financial position for schools going forward and asked how schools would continue to be funded if all schools were in a financial deficit position. She also commented that Estyn were not appreciative of the financial pressures being faced by schools. The Corporate Finance Manager advised that if all schools were in deficit then funding would need to be provided through the Council's reserves. The Cabinet Member for

Education added that current deficits were offset by the surpluses held by schools but as more schools went into deficit this would become a corporate financial risk to the Council.

Councillor David Williams asked if an additional column could be added to future reports showing pupil numbers at each school. The Interim Chief Officer (Education & Youth) agreed to look into the possibility of adding an additional column for pupil numbers following the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the school balances as at the 31 March 2017 be noted.

35. 2018/19 COUNCIL FUND BUDGET – STAGE TWO PROPOSALS FOR THE SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA LEVEL

The Chief Executive presented the stage two proposals for the School funding formula level for the 2018/19 Council Fund Budget. The report outlined the potential risks and mitigations of such proposals on the delivery of quality educational services in Flintshire and provided contextual information on the current level of school balances, reductions in grant funding from Welsh Government (WG) and an overview of the inflationary cost pressures facing schools.

Council at its December meeting approved the Stage two budget for the Council Fund Budget 2018/19 subject to several specific proposals being referred to Overview and Scrutiny for detailed scrutiny prior to further consideration by Cabinet and ultimately Council. One of the specific budget proposals was that schools would only receive a 'cash flat' settlement for 2018-19 creating an efficiency of £1.143m, and that adjustments to school budget were made based on pupil demography, saving a further £0.288m.

The Chief Executive concluded that despite the challenges of austerity over a prolonged period, the Council had managed to provide a degree of financial protection to schools' delegated funding and had previously met the Welsh Government's Ministerial protection percentage uplifts for schools year on year. The challenging financial situation which was requiring the Council to consider setting only a 'cash flat' budget for schools had been created by nationally set policies such as reductions in Revenue Support Grant and specific grants, and the lack of funding for costs pressures beyond the Council's control e.g. pay awards for teachers and support staff, and an increase in employers' National Insurance contributions.

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) reported that Schools had been proactive in adjusting to reducing funding levels and had critically reviewed their budgets to absorb pressures whilst focusing on maintaining the delivery of a quality curriculum and improving learner outcomes. Open discussions had been held with Schools with some more exposed to the financial challenges than others. A further risk to school budgets was the reduction of specific grants in the Education and Youth Portfolio, as detailed within the report, which schools relied

on to deliver services themselves or from which they received support services directly from the Council.

The Chairman invited Mrs. Rachel Molyneux, Richard Collett, Mrs. Ann Peers and Mr. John Wier, representing the Primary and Secondary Head Teachers Federation, to outline to the Committee their views on the current budget proposals for schools. A copy of the representations made are attached at Appendix 1 and 2 of the minutes.

The Leader of the Council thanked the Head Teachers for their attendance. He commented on the continued challenges of austerity and the possible financial challenges facing the Council in the future financial years if the austerity programme continued. He detailed the specific requests which had been made to Welsh Government (WG) for additional funding through an increase in the Domiciliary Care Fee Cap, recovery of 50% of the Apprentice Tax Levy, and a guarantee of future financial contributions through the Intermediate Care Fund (ICF). He supported the case being put forward by Head Teachers and the need to continue to lobby UK National Government and Welsh Government to seek additional funding to protect front line services.

The Cabinet Member for Education also thanked Head Teachers for their attendance and commented on the difficult position facing Councillors who wanted to continue to improve services for residents in Flintshire and not see continued reductions in funding. He said that there had been regular communication with Head Teachers about the challenges facing the Council in setting a balanced budget and that they had indicated their willingness to work proactively through their professional associations and to appeal to WG directly to demonstrate the real challenges that they were facing in maintaining educational provision with reducing budgets.

Councillor Kevin Hughes thanked the Head Teachers for their attendance and said that the Council was indebted to them for all their hard work in the schools across Flintshire. He said that since becoming a Councillor, budget constraints had been constant concern and supported Head Teachers, teachers, school governors and pupils in speaking to their MP and AM to raise concerns around reducing funding to the Council. A number of Councillors spoke in support of these comments and supported the need for continued lobbying for National UK Government and Welsh Government.

Mrs. Rebecca Stark thanked the Leader, Cabinet Member and officers for presenting such a difficult report and for being open and transparent with the Committee on the financial challenges moving forward. She raised concerns around the impact continued cuts in funding would have on teachers and children and said that there was a need to collectively respond to the challenges being faced.

Mr. David Hytch commented on the superb effort from all teaching staff for the improvements in performance year on year whilst budgets continued to be reduced year on year. He raised concerns around the well-being of teaching staff given continued increases in workload as a result of reducing funding and asked

that this be monitored going forward. He commented on the possibility of reducing the school teaching day as had been proposed in parts of England but said that this could become a child care issue and additional financial pressure for parents and hoped that this could be resisted. He concluded that continued budget reductions had become a 'tipping point' and supported the continued lobbying of Governments.

Councillor Tudor Jones spoke in support of the comments made and raised concerns around the impact of reducing budgets on small rural schools and the concerns on future school closures. Councillor Dave Mackie said that whilst understanding the difficult positions facing officers, the proposed 'cash-flat' settlement would only set children up to fail in the future and asked that officers work together with Head Teachers to see if a solution could be found. Councillor David Williams raised concerns around the level of support that would be available for children with additional needs.

In response to the comments and concerns raised, the Chief Executive commented on the limited options available for funding the budget gap. He said that Flintshire had one of the leanest and least costly management structures in Wales and that services had been reviewed, and in some cases transformed, to help meet funding pressures in recent years. A potential efficiency from the GwE was being negotiated but the Council was contractually committed to that service. There was a growing body of evidence that Flintshire was a low funded Council per capita in the way funding was allocated. Schools in Flintshire were funded at lower levels compared to many other Welsh authorities and the 'per pupil' funding was below the Welsh average. The main options available to the Council going forward was to continue to provide a focused, evidence based argument to the WG to demand financial assistance.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee acknowledges the work done in previous years to protect schools budgets;
- (b) That the Committee recognises that a 'cash flat' settlement poses risks to schools and their ability to deliver the curriculum effectively;
- (c) That should additional resources become available, the Committee recommends that Council provides an uplift to schools budgets if at all possible; and
- (d) That the Committee urge all parties to campaign as vigorously as possible, the National UK Government and Welsh Government to see an increase in quantum funding.

36. WELSH GOVERNMENT'S (WG) 21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS PROGRAMME AND EDUCATION PROGRAMME BAND B AND MUTUAL INVESTMENT MODEL (MIM)

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) introduced the report which outlined the projects contained within the Council's Strategic Outline Programme (SOP) submission to Welsh Government (WG). The report also detailed the principles used and assumptions made to deliver a programme with as minimal impact on future revenue budgets and information around the Mutual Investment Model (MIM).

The Leader of the Council advised that the SOP had yet to be approved by Cabinet. He explained that WG had requested that the programmes be prioritised, however given the complex programme would be over a 5/6 year period, there would need to be a degree of flexibility around the prioritisation with the Education Programme Board continuing to review the programme.

In response to questions around the MIM, the Senior Manager School Planning and Provision explained that this was the WG's new form of Public Partnership or Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Through this service the Council would receive an intervention rate of 75% funding from WG with 25% funded by the Council for a period of 25 years. The funding from WG would be received in the form of a specific grant.

In response to comments around Welsh medium education, the Chief Officer reported that through the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP), the Council was committed to increasing the number of pupils accessing Welsh medium education to help WG achieve its ambitious target of a million Welsh speakers by 2050.

Councillor Tudor Jones spoke in support of rural schools which he felt should be actively sustained. He also commented on the need to actively progress federation and proposed that any reference to the closure of a rural school within the programme be removed. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Patrick Heesom. When put to the vote this proposal was lost.

Mrs. Rebecca Stark questioned whether the report should have been considered in a public forum and raised concerns around the impact such proposals could have on school placements. The Chief Officer responded that all schools had been briefed with discussions taking place with all Head Teachers individually on the programme and it had been explained that they were a provisional set of proposals at this stage.

Mr. David Hytch asked for information on the land at Ysgol Maes Edwin and Ysgol Llanfynydd following their closure. The Senior Manager School Planning and Provision confirmed that options were currently being considered for the land at Ysgol Maes Edwin and that the land at Ysgol Llanfynydd had been sold.

RESOLVED:

That the observations of the Committee be reported to Cabinet on Tuesday 23 January 2018.

37. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Education & Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme for consideration and advised that the items identified during the meeting around Youth Services would be added to the list of scheduled items for 12 April, 2018 meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be amended;
- (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 arose; and

38. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were 35 members of the public and 1 member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 5.24 pm)

.....
Chairman