

**JOINT EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE AND SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE  
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEES  
30 JUNE 2022**

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Joint Education, Youth & Culture and Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committees of Flintshire County Council held on Thursday 30 June 2022

**PRESENT:**

Councillors Helen Brown, Mel Buckley, Teresa Carberry, Tina Claydon, Bill Crease, Paul Cunningham, Gladys Healey, Andy Hughes, Dave Mackie, Gina Maddison, Hilary McGuill, Andrew Parkhurst, Michelle Perfect, Carolyn Preece, David Richardson, Jason Shallcross and Linda Thomas

**CO-OPTED MEMBERS:** Lynn Bartlett

**APPOLOGIES:** Mrs Wendy White

**CONTRIBUTORS:**

Councillor Ian Roberts, Leader of the Council and 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, Chief Officer (Education & Youth), Chief Officer (Social Services), Senior Manager (School Improvement) (for minute number 4), Senior Manager (Safeguarding and Commissioning) (for minute number 4), Senior Manager (Children and Workforce) (for minute numbers 5 and 7), Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) (for minute numbers 6 and 7), Learning Adviser for Health, Well-being and Safeguarding (for minute number 8).

**1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR**

Councillor Paul Cunningham proposed Councillor Hilary McGuill as Chair of the meeting. This was seconded by Councillor Dave Mackie.

**RESOLVED:**

That Councillor Hilary McGuill be appointed as Chair for the joint meeting

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)**

None were received.

**3. WELSH GOVERNMENT (WG) PROGRAMMES SUMMER OF FUN AND WINTER OF WELL-BEING**

In presenting the report the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) provided a detailed overview of the successful “summer of fun” and the “winter of wellbeing” programmes confirming that updates had been presented to the Education Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee in December 2021. The national evaluation

report demonstrated how important this was to young people and Welsh Government (WG) had agreed to provide further funding through the winter and for this year's programme.

The Chief Officer provided an overview of the key objectives and activities provided and outlined the collaborative work undertaken with partners (Aura libraries and leisure, young carers, NEWCIS, Menter Iaith Flint a Wrecsam and Theatr Clwyd) and the teams who supported this. Information on how the funding of £276,000 would be distributed to enable targeted support for vulnerable families was given and she explained how these would be promoted to families. This had been delivered in conjunction with existing schemes that the Council already provided with Town & Community Councils.

In response to questions from the Chair on provision of food, accessibility and registration, the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) confirmed food would be provided at the summer of fun events, but not at the Council's playschemes as WG had enabled direct payments to be made to families entitled to free school meals during the school holidays. However, WG had agreed for some food and snacks to be provided at the playschemes. Referring to the accessibility question, the Chief Officer advised that the activities were spread geographically across the authority with the aim to enable as many families as possible to attend within local communities.

In response to a question from Councillor Andrew Parkhurst on provision in rural areas, the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) confirmed this would be provided across the county and agreed to circulate information on this following the meeting. She confirmed that vulnerable children were specifically being targeted with the support of the Youth Justice and Children Services teams. Information on the provision of buddies to enable children to access Playschemes in their area was also given.

In response to a question from Councillor Andy Hughes on promotion of these events, the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) confirmed that social media, the family information service, and every other means possible was being used to promote this. She asked Members if they could assist in getting the message across that would be helpful. The Chair added that it was on her Community Council website and circulated via local schools in their newsletters.

In response to a question from Councillor Gladys Healey concerning the playscheme in Hope, the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) confirmed that Town and Community Councils were approached earlier in the year to collaborate to support the summer playschemes and she agreed to speak to Councillor Healey outside of the meeting. The Summer of Fun would not have been shared as it was run by the County Council.

Councillor Andrew Parkhurst wanted to ensure that the Town and Community Councils were aware of the Summer of Fun programme and that all families living in rural communities were able to access the Summer of Fun programme. The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) said the Playscheme information had been sent but not

the Summer of Fun as it was run by the Council but agreed to feed this back to the strategic planning meetings.

Councillor Teresa Carberry thanked all the offices and partners groups involved. The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) agreed to feedback the committees' thanks to the team.

The recommendations, outlined within the report, were moved and seconded by Councillor Dave Mackie and Mrs Lynn Bartlett.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Joint Committee is reassured that children and young people in Flintshire have benefitted from Welsh Government funding through the Winter of Wellbeing Programme;
- (b) That the Joint Committee is satisfied with the arrangements for the Summer of Fun programme for 2022; and
- (c) That the feedback from the national evaluation of the Welsh Government programmes which provided evidence of their positive impact on children and young people be acknowledged

**4. SAFEGUARDING IN EDUCATION**

The Learning Adviser for Health, Well-being and Safeguarding provided an overview of safeguarding processes provided by the Council and Officer involvement on the Education & Youth Safeguarding Panel and with Children's Services. Information on the priorities around safeguarding training and sharing key information with schools to keep learners safe was also provided.

The Learning Adviser for Health, Well-being and Safeguarding provided information on the key focus around the Welsh Government (WG) Keeping Learning Safe guidance, which included an audit tool for schools to use and she explained that all schools had statutory duties especially around safeguarding. During the summer all the audit tools and reports would be reviewed to enable feedback to be provided on key themes which would assist with training. She provided an overview of the professional training, which was delivered online, and which had received positive feedback with the comments shaping future training programmes.

Information on the Education & Youth Safeguarding Panel Action Plan and the Estyn Action Plan was provided, and it was confirmed the WG Action Plan was still awaited. An explanation was given on how this would be embedded in schools ready for the September term.

The Senior Manager (School Improvement) thanked the Learning Adviser for Health, Well-being and Safeguarding for her work. She re-assured Members that the team provided excellent advice, training, professional development, and support to schools to signpost them to different agencies. The Education & Youth

Safeguarding Panel sat under the Corporate Safeguarding Panel ensuring that all processes were up to date.

Councillor Teresa Carberry commented that she had undertaken the training which she commended. Following suggestions of additional online topics for training, the Learning Adviser for Health, Well-being and Safeguarding agreed to speak to Councillor Carberry following the meeting.

Councillor Bill Crease recommended that all Members undertook this training and commended the work provided by the Council. The Senior Manager (School Improvement) said that the new training and refresher training were excellent ways of learning. She would be happy to circulate some suggestions and was open to receive any ideas for training for School Governors. As this was held online more training sessions had been provided.

The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure said that this was not just an issue for schools and social services, it was for everyone working at the authority. He provided examples of concerns raised regarding at schools, modern slavery, controlling behaviour, domestic abuse, or abuse of vulnerable adults. He urged Councillors to take up the offer of training to gain a better understanding of these issues which were operating in Flintshire. He thanked officers who dealt with these matters daily in schools or across the whole of the Council.

The Chief Officer (Social Services) reported that he was a co-chair with the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) on the Corporate Safeguarding Panel. Referring to the corporate safeguarding training he urged Members to undertake the training so they could be fully informed to make decisions. During the pandemic there had been a significant increase in reports, especially for vulnerable adults, and the training would enable Members to be fully appraised in these situations. The Senior Manager (Safeguarding and Commissioning) suggested that the safeguarding contact numbers and information be circulated to Members of the Joint Committee following the meeting.

The Chair referred to previous years when a poster was placed in secondary school toilets providing contact information for pupils who felt at risk and asked if this was still in place. The Learning Adviser for Health, Well-being and Safeguarding agreed to check and make sure information on referrals was visible in schools.

In response to questions from Councillor Carolyn Preece on mandatory safeguarding training and safeguarding button, the Senior Manager (Safeguarding and Commissioning) said there was a safeguarding button that everyone could press together with a telephone number. The best way to report any concerns was via the safeguarding report form, and she agreed to circulate information on this. The Learning Adviser for Health, Well-being and Safeguarding confirmed that the safeguarding lead or governor with level 3 training would be expected to undertake training every two years. Level 2 course training would be every three years but for best practice this was provided annually for the whole school staff.

Referring to the Corporate Safeguarding Panel, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Social Services and Wellbeing, provided information of representations across the county. She suggested that Members download the Wales Safeguarding Procedures App as it explained all the procedures for children and adults and was very simple to use. It was a good reference tool and well worth having on your phone. The Training was easy to complete and did not take a lot of time.

Mrs Lynn Bartlett was pleased that that peer sexual harassment in secondary schools was included and suggested that the Joint Committee receive a report on Relationships and Sexual Education in due course to provide information on how this was contributing to reducing harm. This suggestion was supported by the Committee.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved and seconded by Councillor Bill Crease and Councillor Teresa Carberry

**RESOLVED:**

That the content of the safeguarding in education report be noted.

**5 PLACEMENT COMMISSIONING STRATEGY**

The Senior Manager (Children and Workforce) presented the Placement Commissioning Strategy which set out the Council's ambitions and plans to support looked after children locally with parents and families being given support to provide safe loving homes in Flintshire. Some children would require foster care and residential care and if they could be kept in Flintshire it would enable them to sustain their friendships, keep their schools placements, friends and family connections. It was also easier for the authority's officers to maintain that support and build trust if they remained within Flintshire and resulted in better outcomes. However, for some children they would need to move away from Flintshire for their own safety and well-being.

The Senior Manager (Children and Workforce) provided detailed information on "the Mockingbird" approach to fostering and outlined how the three hubs grouped foster carers together in clusters to support each other. He outlined the issues around recruitment of foster carers and that the authority was reliant on commercial independent fostering agencies. These commercial agencies recruited their own foster carers and the authority had to buy the placements from them at a much higher cost. He recommended that Members visited Arosfa, a residential home run by Action for Children, which provided respite care for children with disabilities and outlined the support provided there. At present this was the only in-house residential provision for residential care and the Council was totally reliant on the Independent Sector. He referred to the Independent Sector placements within Flintshire which had worked well with positive outcomes. He provided an overview of the programme for developing residential care homes with two being developed in Mold.

The Strategy set out the Council's ambition over the next three years which aligned with Welsh Government's (WG) ambition to eliminate profit from children's

social care. Information was provided on the funding, template and partnership working and the number of foster carers and placements that would be required to achieve this.

In response to a question from Councillor Gina Maddison on why people chose the Independent Agencies rather than the Council, the Senior Manager (Children and Workforce) confirmed that these Agencies charged the authority more and paid foster carers more money. All local authorities in Wales were working together to develop a local authority brand and he provided detailed information on the work that was being undertaken.

In response to a question from the Chair about carers who chose to care for sibling groups, the Senior Manager (Children and Workforce) confirmed that there were a range of initiatives as the Council was a foster friendly employer and these were explained together with other schemes available to support sibling groups.

In response to a question from Councillor Gladys Healey on the age limit for foster carers, the Senior Manager (Children and Workforce) confirmed there was no limit, and the process was fully inclusive, as it was about the best fit for the child.

In response to a question from Councillor Andy Hughes on the differences were between the processes for private providers and the Council, the Senior Manager (Children and Workforce) confirmed the assessments were the same. There were different thresholds especially with regards to skills and resilience, where applicants were deemed unsuitable by the authority but were accepted by the Independent Agencies but added that there were excellent carers in the Independent Fostering Agencies. The Independent Fostering Agencies were sometimes quicker processing applications, but it was felt there were disadvantages to that as we needed to ensure that the foster carers were fully prepared. He provided information on the timescale and panel processes.

Councillor Dave Mackie referred to the Foster Care Panel which he was a member of and said the foster carers were seen before the six-month period. It was dependant on the information provided by the foster carers and their availability for panel, with some people getting through quite quickly.

The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure commented that Officers in Social Services were working in very difficult circumstances as decisions had to be made to remove children from their families. These children had experienced adverse childhood trauma and the Council had to support them. He was pleased that WG had made a commitment to make children's social care non-profitmaking.

Councillor Andrew Parkhurst commented on the standard of foster carers at Independent Fostering Agencies and whether the outcomes for foster children were measured in-house verses private. The Senior Manager (Children and Workforce) explained that in Wales there was an approved framework that the Council had to use to buy placements. This was managed by the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (CCCC) which all providers had to be registered with. Quality assurance was undertaken to enable registration with checks on their processes and

finances managed by the CCCC. If the council were unable to offer a place for a child, then the information would be uploaded on to the system for Independent Providers to offer a place. The Council then had to carry out its own due diligence and had developed its own framework to ensure the placement was safe and appropriate and were registered with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).

Councillor Parkhurst raised concerns around whether foster carers were vetted to ensure they were up to the required standard. The Senior Manager (Children and Workforce) confirmed that the profile of the young person would be looked at with quality assurance processes carried out to see if that foster carer was the best fit for the child. Independent Reviewing Officers, as part of their roles, reviewed outcomes for each child and monitored whether their needs were being met within the first 28 days of placement. In addition, the social workers visited every 6 weeks, and the foster carers were part of the review and held to account for the care they were providing.

Councillor Tina Claydon commented that she had visited Ty Neath which was excellent and asked if there were plans to build more of these units in the future. The Senior Manager (Children and Workforce) provided information on what was hoped to be achieved at Ty Neath, the property next to Ty Neath and another property recently submitted to Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). A bid had been made to WG to carry out more refurbishments and he provided an overview of the application process, assessment of locations and timeframes involved.

Councillor Andy Hughes commented that bringing more services back in house was key and asked for information on current social worker staffing levels. The Senior Manager (Children and Workforce) confirmed that the recruitment and retention of children's social workers was a significant challenge and provided information on the national gaps in social care across Wales and across the Country. The Programme growing and developing in house staff was continuing together with a successful recruitment programme with agency staff used in the short term as there were challenges attracting Level 3 Social Workers. The Chief Officer (Social Services) reported that there was a national shortage of social workers and statutory frontline childcare work which was very challenging, with recruitment and retention after 5 years qualified a real issue for all authorities. The authority was looking at pay, better use of agency social workers and working with partners and neighbouring authorities. He asked members for assistance in promoting the service to ensure the Council's reputation remained as positive as possible.

The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure reported that the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) were working to get national pay scales across Wales which would assist in the recruitment and retention challenges. He outlined the work Cabinet was undertaking with senior officers around this area.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved and seconded by Councillor Carolyn Preece and Councillor Gladys Healey.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Joint Committee support the future commissioning intentions as detailed in the Placement Commissioning Strategy to be submitted to Welsh Government.

**6. ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS AND EDUCATION TRIBUNAL (WALES) ACT 2018**

The Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) outlined the key points in the report, advising that Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act 2008 came into being in 2008 but was not fully implemented until September 2021.

The Special Educational Needs (SEN) and new Additional Learning Needs (ALN) systems would be running in parallel for three years. Information on the processes for identifying if a child had additional learning needs and moving a child from one system to the other was provided together with an explanation of the Individual Development Plan (IDP). Now that the Code had been published it had enabled processes and panels to be put in place when identifying if a child had additional learning needs and implementing the IDPs.

The Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) reported that several statutory roles had been identified within the Code which included the creation of ALN Co-ordinators in schools and the Early Years Additional Learning Lead Officer with responsibility for pre-school children. An overview was provided of the ECLIPSE system which ensured schools and the authority carried out their responsibilities and the new requirements for pupils with ALN. Information on the training provided to schools, new requirements and consultation carried out in schools as well as changes regarding post 16 learners was provided.

The Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) confirmed that she was a member of the National Steering Group which had been set up to guide Councils around ALNET and ensure that the work on developing a Post 16 funding scheme was fair to all local authorities. She confirmed that challenges made to WG with regards to the cost neutrality of the new ALN legislation, which included a letter from the Chair of this committee, had had an impact with WG now providing additional funding for councils and schools for a 3-year period to support implementation. Further information on how the grant funding would be used was also provided.

The Senior Learning Advisor for Additional Learning Needs commented that the feedback from families and schools on the new system and processes had been very positive. There had been increased collaboration with the ALN Coordinators, children and young people and parents in line with the Council's principles. The feedback was reassuring.

Councillor Dave Mackie raised concerns that this could become a costly time-consuming process for schools. He commented on the WG guidance with regards to the processes for Post 16 learners which had only just been published and suggested that the Joint Committee receive a report outlining the approach to the identification and commissioning of post 16 education for Flintshire young people in due course. The Committee supported this suggestion.

The Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) confirmed that the funding would be kept under review and provided information on the forum meetings attending by officers and WG ministers to ensure this was at the forefront of discussions. She provided detailed information on the Regional Post 16 working group meetings and on the 'flow through model' and agreed to bring a report back to this Joint Committee in due course.

Mrs Lynn Bartlett asked if all children were moving from one system to the other or were some children not qualifying. She was also pleased that Health was supporting this especially for early years children. The Senior Learning Advisor for Additional Learning Needs confirmed the definition of ALN was not dissimilar to SEN but that some pupils may now receive support through a school's universal provision without the need for an IDP. She explained that there could be fewer children formally identified as having ALN, but that children and families were now more involved with the schools in these decisions, with the priority being to ensure that individual needs are met. She confirmed that there had always been good relationships with Health colleagues.

In response to a question from the Chair on parents' right of appeal, the Senior Learning Advisor for Additional Learning Needs confirmed parents still had the right of appeal as do children and young people. If parents or children were not satisfied with the school assessment/decision or IDP, their first approach should be to contact the authority. This matter would be considered by the authority and if this decision/plan was upheld and no changes were proposed, then the parents or child had the right to approach the Education Tribunal for Wales.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved and seconded by Councillor Carolyn Preece and Mrs Lynn Bartlett

### **RESOLVED:**

That Committee receives and considers the report on the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018.

## **7. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IN FLINTSHIRE**

The Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) provided an overview of the highlights for the key stages and the links with social care. An outline of the percentage of pupils with special education needs in this cohort was provided together with the number of pupils with Individual Development Plan (IDPs) that the authority had responsibility for, as this had changed. The Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Officer with responsibility for children who were looked after has mapped out and provided a timeline for these children to ensure the authority was assessing their needs under the new ALN legislation. She reported on the role of the Vulnerable Learning Co-ordinator and Service Manager who worked with children who were looked after, schools, and foster carers to ensure these children accessed their education. Most children who were looked after were educated in mainstream schools within Flintshire with a small minority requiring more specialist provision.

For those children who left school last year Welsh Government (WG) had not requested outcome data to be collated but destination data had been recorded and she provided information on this. The Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) provided detail on the Steering Group and the funding available to support these children and the virtual school model being considered by WG.

The Chair commented on the effect of funding being provided directly to looked after children leaving care, as announced by WG and asked whether officers felt this would be a positive change or if they thought it would have a negative effect on the young people. The Senior Manager (Children and Workforce) suggested that a report be presented to the Joint Committee in 12 months to outline challenges and positive working from the pilot and how young people were being supported.

In response to a question from Councillor Andrew Parkhurst on the percentage of looked after children with special educational needs, the Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) indicated that it was difficult to determine whether children became looked after because of their special needs or whether they developed special needs due to being looked after and it was likely to be a mix of both factors. She agreed to speak to colleagues in the Educational Psychology Service who may be aware of research into this. She provided reassurance that there were lots of services across education and social care who assist children and that the support would differ from child to child.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved and seconded by Councillor David Mackie and Councillor Bill Crease

### **RESOLVED:**

- (a) For Members to actively engage as Cooperate Parents for looked after children, promoting awareness and challenging provision within Flintshire educational settings; and
- (b) For Members to actively encourage all educational staff to promote the educational welfare of looked after children within Flintshire establishments at a 'whole school level'.

## **8. PERIOD DIGNITY UPDATE**

The Learning Adviser for Health, Well-being and Safeguarding presented the report which explained how the Welsh Government (WG) funding was being used to ensure all pupils were able to access products. She provided an overview of the WG Strategic Action 5 Year Plan which was awaiting publication.

An overview of the Grant Funding provided to local authorities and schools had been given with information on how the products would be distributed. The funding had increased with a requirement that 50% of the products be eco-friendly and information on the contract and products supplied was provided.

The Learning Adviser for Health, Well-being and Safeguarding provided information on the "Hey Girls" contract, which had been commissioned to provide

products, chosen by pupils, which were then delivered to their home address. Over 2000 orders had been made and an overview of the products and year groups supported was provided in the report. She explained what eco products were available with WG requiring 90% to be eco-friendly. This year flexibility was provided by WG to enable some of the funding to be used to provide training for teachers in schools around puberty at the right age. The Code for relationships and sexuality would be enforced in September in schools and several workshops had been arranged to ensure teachers were prepared. An outline of the funding for this year was provided with plans to extend the work with “Hey Girls”. There was also an increased offer to youth clubs, food banks, refugees and community hubs with 8 – 18-year-olds able to order online.

Councillor Paul Cunningham commended the report and felt that this should be further highlighted to support pupils who could not afford the products.

Councillor Teresa Carberry said it addressed inequalities and that this was now more openly discussed in schools with topics taught in mixed gender groups. She was pleased that staff were receiving training to deliver this and that the products were available within the schools which was great.

Councillor Carolyn Preece commended the report and welcomed the use of eco-friendly products.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved and seconded by Councillor Paul Cunningham and Councillor Teresa Carberry

**RESOLVED:**

That the Committee was assured that the grant funding had been appropriately spent and had helped to meet the needs of those targeted by the Welsh Government initiative.

**9. 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 4.48 pm)

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**Chair**