

LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
14 NOVEMBER 2013

Minutes of the meeting of the Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at Flint High School, Maes Hyfryd, Flint, Flintshire CH6 5LL on Thursday, 14 November 2013

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors Adele Davies-Cooke, Ian Dunbar, Ron Hampson, Stella Jones, Colin Legg, Phil Lightfoot, Dave Mackie, Nancy Matthews, Paul Shotton and Nigel Steele-Mortimer

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: David Hytch

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors Haydn Bateman (for Amanda Bragg) and Ray Hughes (for David Williams)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Marion Bateman, Rita Price, Rebecca Stark, Rosalind Williams and Stephanie Williams. Cabinet Member for Education, and Director of Lifelong Learning

CONTRIBUTORS: Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection and Leisure, Head of Development and Resources, Head of Culture and Leisure, Finance Manager, Interim Facilities Manager, Primary Link Officer, and Corporate Training Officer

IN ATTENDANCE: Housing and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

Prior to the start of the meeting the Chairman expressed thanks on behalf of the Committee to Mrs Pam McClean, Headteacher, Flint High School, for her hospitality and to the pupils: Emily Moore, Danny McAdam, Kate Pierce and Tom Hill for escorting Members on their tour of the School.

46. 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 Councillor Phil Lightfoot (who was not a school governor) declared an interest as school governors.

47. MINUTES

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

Accuracy

Flintshire Music Service Review

Councillor Dave Mackie asked that the word 'next' be removed from the third paragraph and the third resolution.

School Kitchen Ventilation Replacement Scheme

David Hytch referred to his comments and asked that the minutes be amended to reflect that he had referred to the excellent educational support provided by the Authority but had highlighted a number of shortcomings in the property services which had had an adverse impact on the reputation of the Authority.

Matters arising

Schools Funding Formula Review

Councillor Dave Mackie referred to the discussion which had taken place at the previous meeting concerning funding for administration in large primary schools and expressed the view that the minutes had not sufficiently conveyed the strength of feeling regarding the issue.

RESOLVED:

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

48. APPRENTICESHIPS, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The Head of Culture and Leisure introduced a report to update the Committee on progress in relation to the creation of apprenticeships and training opportunities. He provided background information and referred to the main progress and achievements gained to date.

The Head of Culture and Leisure introduced Heather Johnson, Corporate Training Officer, and invited her to give an overview of the Flintshire County Council Apprenticeship scheme. She advised that the Authority had exceeded its target intake of apprenticeships for this year and had matched last year's intake. The Authority was one of three finalists for a Welsh Government Award for Apprenticeships (Macro Apprentice Employer of the Year Award) and was the only public sector finalist for the award. The Corporate Training Officer also referred to the work undertaken by Communities First concerning funding for future science, technology, engineering and mathematics events (STEM), and Deeside Enterprise Zone to engage businesses to work closely with schools around the STEM subjects. She advised that Deeside Enterprise Zone was also exploring the potential to make apprenticeships more accessible to small and medium size employers. Members were informed that a skills gap survey was undertaken in May 2013 and would inform future planning.

During discussion further information was sought concerning the Employers' Promise initiative, Job Club programmes and how the Apprenticeships, Training and Development opportunities could be rolled out to more schools across Flintshire and the Leisure and Library services. The Head of Culture and Leisure responded to the comments and queries raised and advised that an update report which would include the additional information sought would be submitted to a meeting of the Committee in six months time.

Councillor Nancy Matthews commented on how the Apprenticeships, Training and Development opportunities would assist small businesses. She referred to the difficulties experienced by small and medium sized employers in terms of the beaurarcy involved in administering apprenticeship and trainee schemes. She said that many businesses were keen to participate but required support to assist them to provide such programmes.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That an update report be submitted to the Committee in six months time

49. SCHOOL PERFORMANCE MONITORING GROUP ANNUAL REPORT

The Chairman welcomed Claire Homard, Primary Link Officer, to the meeting and invited her to present the School Performance Monitoring Group Annual Report. She provided background information and advised that the School Standards Monitoring Group (SSMG) had been established to ensure that schools who were under-performing were rigorously challenged by the Authority and appropriately supported to make progress and improve outcomes for learners.

The Primary Link Officer referred to the criteria for monitoring schools and the monitoring cycle. She reported that ten primary schools had been subjected to monitoring during 2012-13 and referred to the common themes identified in securing school improvement. She commented that initially schools had found the process daunting, however, overall the outcome had been positive and constructive in maintaining the momentum of school improvement.

The Primary Link Officer highlighted the high level of multi-agency work undertaken in schools to meet the needs of individual learners and their families. She also referred to the level of intervention required to ensure learners were developing expressive and receptive language skills that would enable them to access the curriculum and the delays in accessing speech therapy services because of waiting times due to pressures in the Health Service.

Councillor Dave Mackie proposed that the concerns raised by the School Performance Monitoring Group on the delays in children being able to access speech therapy services because of waiting times due to pressures in the health service be passed to the Social & Health Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee to address with Betsi Cadwaladr at a future meeting.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That the concerns raised by the School Performance Monitoring Group on the delays in children being able to access speech therapy services because of waiting times due to pressures in the Health Service be passed

to the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee to address with Betsi Cadwaladr at a future meeting.

50. SCHOOL BALANCES

The Finance Manager introduced a report on Flintshire school balances for the year ending March 2013. She provided background information and advised that the balance for each school in Flintshire had been appended to the report. An amended list of balances to include the percentage of balances carried forward was distributed to the Committee.

The Finance Manager reported that the general position for Flintshire schools identified a decrease of 5% in overall balances which equated to £114 per pupil in Flintshire compared to the Wales average of £154 per pupil. Overall in Wales there had been an increase of 2.9% in school balances. She gave an overview of the secondary school and primary school balances and advised that all schools with excess balances had been asked to submit detailed spending plans which were scrutinised and challenged by the Schools Accounting Team. The Finance Manager advised that the Authority had two schools with a licensed deficit.

Councillor Ian Dunbar commented on the need for Primary schools to retain funding for contingency plans. He expressed concerns regarding the requirements set out in the School Funding (Wales) Regulations 2010 and Flintshire Scheme for Financing Schools relating to primary school balances and the level of surplus that could be carried forward by schools.

Mr. David Hytch referred to the role and responsibilities of Governing Bodies as employers and commented on the need for a financial strategy that would maintain sustainable staffing.

In response to a query from Councillor Nancy Matthews concerning how schools were allowed to set a deficit budget, the Finance Manager advised that further clarification would be provided to Members during the School Funding Formula Review workshop on the 5 December 2013.

During discussion concerns were expressed that the level of school balances should be based on the % of pupils attending the school and that some primary schools had higher pupil numbers than high schools but they were only allowed to hold balances of £50,000 compared to £100,000 for primary schools. It was agreed that the Finance Manager would write to the Minister for Education on behalf of the Committee asking him to consider changing the threshold for intervention from cash terms to percentage terms where surplus budgets were held by schools.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That the Finance Manager writes to the Minister for Education on behalf of the Committee asking him to consider changing the threshold for

intervention from cash terms to percentage terms where surplus budgets were being held by schools.

51. FACILITIES REVIEW

The Interim Facilities Manager introduced a report to provide a comprehensive update on the implementation of various service improvement initiatives designed to ensure the Facilities Services Unit complements 21st Century Schools and meets the legislative requirements of the Welsh Governments Appetite for Life health and wellbeing programme. He also provided a presentation on Flintshire School Meals. The main points of the presentation were:

- Aims
- Brand development
- Communication
- Service initiatives
- Before and After

Councillor Nancy Matthews asked if school restaurant facilities could be open for longer periods during the school day. The Interim Facilities Manager reported that discussions were taking place at one high school concerning the provision of an all day facility. Councillor Matthews also expressed concern that there could be too much choice on the menu.

During discussion the Interim Facilities Manager responded to Members concerns around the cost of school meals, the time of the school lunch period, and the issue of fast food retail outlets located in close proximity to school premises.

The Chairman thanked the Interim Facilities Manager for his presentation and responses to Members' questions.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee receives further updates on the Facilities Review on a quarterly basis.

52. IMPROVEMENT PLAN MONITORING REPORT

The Housing and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the 2013/14 Mid Year Improvement Plan Monitoring Report relevant to the Committee for the period April to September 2013. She provided background information and advised that the Improvement Plan Monitoring Report explained the progress being made towards delivery of the impacts set out in the Improvement Plan. Members were asked to consider and comment on the Improvement Plan sub-priority reports on Modernised and High Performing

Education, Places of Modernised Learning, and Apprenticeships and Training, which were appended to the report.

Councillor Dave Mackie referred to the suggestion made at the recent meeting of the Community Profile and Partnerships Overview & Scrutiny Committee that a Members workshop be arranged to assist Members to scrutinise and comment effectively on the newly introduced improvement plan performance monitoring approach. The Facilitator advised that it had been agreed that a workshop would be held for Members in the New Year to consider this task.

Councillor Ian Dunbar referred to the information contained in appendix two concerning changing demographics and the impact on supply of school places. He commented on new residential developments in his Ward and the impact on capacity in local schools. The Head of Development and Resources acknowledged the issues raised and advised that the Authority's policy was to ensure that there was sufficient places for the local community that the school served.

In response to the concerns raised by Members around the use of temporary accommodation, the Head of Development and Resources explained that there had been a sharp increase in the birth rate in certain areas and to meet the urgent needs of those communities temporary accommodation had been put in place. He referred to the difficulty in some areas of replacing temporary with permanent accommodation due to cost and building restrictions on site but gave an assurance that the use of mobile classrooms was avoided wherever possible. Responding to the further questions raised by Members concerning the cost of mobile classrooms he advised that the number of mobile classrooms in use had been reduced substantially and would continue to be replaced whenever possible under the capital programme and subject to available finance.

The Head of Development and Resources also explained that the Authority was unable to expand on schools which attracted high demand for admissions at the expense of those schools which had surplus places. Councillor Dave Mackie sought clarification on the schools admission policy and the Head of Development and Resources gave an outline of the current legislation.

It was agreed that the Head of Development and Resources would provide information to the Committee which detailed the longevity of accommodation which was not classed as permanent.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That the Head of Development and Resources provides information to the Committee which detailed the longevity of accommodation which was not classed as permanent.

53. MID YEAR SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Housing and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the 2013/14 Mid Year Service Performance report produced at Head of Service/Divisional level under the adopted business model of the Council which covered the period April to September 2013. She advised that detailed Mid Year Service Performance Reports were appended to the report for Schools Services, Development and Resources, and Culture and Leisure Services.

Councillor Nancy Matthews referred to the workforce information which was currently unavailable from Corporate Services and requested that all information be included in future reports.

Councillor Ian Dunbar expressed his appreciation for the work undertaken in partnership with Fields in Trust to secure a protection in perpetuity of recreation grounds nominated as designated Queen Elizabeth II Fields.

Mr. David Hytch referred to the revision of School/Local Authority Partnership Agreement and said he was unaware of the Agreement and asked if a copy could be made available to him. He welcomed the multi agency work that had been undertaken with the aim of identifying effective strategies of support for children with Additional Learning Needs. Mr. Hytch also welcomed the improvement achieved by Looked After Children (LAC) in relation to educational outcomes and asked if further information could be provided on the Officer Group which had been set up to investigate if the Flintshire cohort was representative of the LAC cohort across Wales.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That the comments/observations of the Committee be fed back to the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee who are responsible for the overview and monitoring of performance.

54. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Housing and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the Forward Work Programme of the Committee.

The Facilitator advised that following agreement with the Overview & Scrutiny Chairs, officers had agreed to run all Member workshops in December to consider the 2014/15 budget. She advised that the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 5 December 2013 had been cancelled and an all Member workshop on the School Funding Formula would be held in place of the budget meeting which had been cancelled. She also informed members that a Playscheme Task and Finish Group meeting had been arranged for 18 November 2013.

Members reviewed the current programme and agreed that the following items be considered at the next meeting:

- Health and Safety Annual Report
- Community Events Strategy
- School Funding Formula Review
- Flintshire Music Service Review

The Chairman suggested that the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 30 January, 2014 be held at Ysgol Maes Garmon.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the above the forward work programme be agreed.

55. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press and no members of the public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.10 pm)

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Chairman