

LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
6 MARCH 2014

Minutes of the meeting of the Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at Ysgol Maes Garmon, Conwy Street, Mold CH7 1JB on Thursday, 6 March 2014

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors Marion Bateman, Amanda Bragg, 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, Rebecca Stark, and Rev. John Thelwell

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors Carolyn Thomas (for David Williams)

APOLOGIES: Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection and Leisure. Councillor Ann Minshull and Stephanie Williams

CONTRIBUTORS: Cabinet Member for Education, Director of Lifelong Learning, Head of Development and Resources, Head of Schools Improvement Service, Head of Primary Services, Head of Inclusion Services, and Member Engagement Manager

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 Bronwen Hughes, Headteacher, Ysgol Maes Garmon, for her hospitality and tour of the School.

71. 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 Amanda Bragg and Reverend John Thelwell (who were not school governors) declared an interest as school governors.

72. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 30 January 2014 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

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

73. NATIONAL MODEL FOR REGIONAL WORKING ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The Director of Lifelong Learning introduced a report to provide an update on developments with school improvement services and the new National Model for Regional Working on School Improvement.

The Director provided background information and advised that the Model agreed between Welsh Local Government and the Welsh Government outlined a consistent approach to school improvement activities, such as school-to-school support. The Model aimed to encourage schools to take more responsibility for their own improvement and sought to clarify what activities should be undertaken at local authority level and what was best addressed regionally or nationally.

Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer expressed a number of concerns in relation to the Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service (GwE) and commented that schools in Flintshire had previously been able to use the services of specialist advisors for “free” but were now required to pay for the service under the new scheme.

Councillor Stella Jones raised concerns around the opportunity for scrutiny to be undertaken. In his response the Director advised that the responsibility for securing school improvement lay with individual local authorities, but that new arrangements had been based on less funding being retained by local authorities. He explained that the Model suggested that service governance was best placed in a Joint Committee whose members would be appointed by the constituent local authorities. However, the service is also subject to scrutiny in the individual authorities.

The Director reported that a common business plan template was required to enable consortia to clearly identify their key priorities for the year and the expected outcomes. The Minister for Education and Skills would use the plans as the basis of an outcome agreement with consortia and would formally accept or reject the plans on an annual basis.

The Housing and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator informed Members that Mr. Huw Foster Evans, Managing Director of the Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service (GwE), had agreed to attend the next meeting of the Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee to provide details of the performance of GwE in its first year.

Councillors Carolyn Thomas and Dave Mackie referred to difficulties experienced by schools with the new service. Councillor Thomas also commented on the need for training for school governors. She raised the issue of how local authorities ensured that specific grants were deployed to benefit local learners in the collaborative arrangements.

The Director, Cabinet Member for Education, and Secondary Phase Officer responded to the matters raised. In response to a request from Mrs. Rebecca Stark the Director agreed to distribute a copy of the new 2014/15

business plan for GwE to members for information prior to the next meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Nigel Steele Mortimer proposed that the Committee express its dissatisfaction with the progress made by GwE. This proposal was supported by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee express its dissatisfaction with the progress made by GwE.

74. ANNUAL SCHOOL MODERNISATION REPORT

The Head of Development and Resources introduced a report to update on the progress made with School Modernisation. He provided background information and outlined the key considerations in the report.

Councillor Nancy Matthews referred to the governance arrangements for the proposed post-16 Hub in Connah's Quay. In response to the queries raised by Councillor Matthews, the Head of Development and Resources explained that the new Sixth Form Centre would have its own Governing Body to address the day-to-day running of the centre. Overarching strategic governance would be provided by Coleg Cambria. In answer to the further questions raised by Councillor Matthews concerning staffing arrangements at the Hub, the Head of Service explained that staffing would be ring fenced for those schools affected to reduce the risk of redundancy. The Chairman commented on the need to ensure that there would not be a net loss to teachers in affected schools. The Director advised that Trade Unions were involved in ongoing consultation on the development of school modernisation plans.

In response to comments around the inter-relationship between the school modernisation programme and the repairs and maintenance budget, the Committee agreed that a report on this be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas referred to the consultation to be undertaken with the community of Saltney to consider options for post-16 provision and asked whether Primary schools were also being consulted. She also referred to the issue of funding for the 21st Century Schools programme and sought clarification around any underspend and if this could be reallocated into other projects. The Director confirmed that Welsh Government funding is for designated announced projects only. Only the Local Authority contribution would remain available to the Local Authority's Capital Programme.

Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer referred to the need to commission further review work in relation to primary education and asked if the Committee could have a list of the Primary schools with a high percentage of surplus places. The Director agreed to provide updated data on primary school demography.

In response to a concern from Councillor Mackie and Rebecca Stark the Director confirmed that officers would continue to update members with the

developing plans for the new Sixth Form Centre, for which state of preparedness had been assessed positively at the recent independent Gateway review. This would include arrangements on curriculum design and staffing as they develop over the two and half years to implementation.

Councillor Dave Mackie referred to the report on Secondary School Area Reviews which was submitted to Cabinet on 12 June 2012. He emphasised that the objectives of the Flintshire School Modernisation strategy was to reduce the number of surplus places in secondary schools. He expressed concern that building a new school on the John Summers High School site which was the same size as the current school, would not address the issue of surplus places. In his response the Director referred to the range of principles underpinning school modernisation which had been reflected in Members' consideration and selection of options and preferred outcomes at the time.

Councillor Mackie referred to the Council's UDP and the impact on future housing development and surplus places in secondary schools. Councillor Marion Bateman expressed concerns around the progress of the Northern Gateway development and that the new hub may be over-reliant on the ambitious Northern Gateway plan in Deeside.

The Chairman expressed concern during the meeting that Members "had to ask the right questions in order to obtain information which should have been included in the reports".

Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer proposed that the Committee received a further update report on school modernisation to respond to the issues raised by members during the meeting. The Chairman suggested that the update report included information on the progress of the Northern Gateway development. He also asked that the School Modernisation Partnership Board be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to respond to members' questions.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee receives further update reports on school modernisation to respond to the issues raised by members during the meeting;
- (b) That the update report includes information on the progress of the Northern Gateway development; and
- (c) That the School Modernisation Partnership Board be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee.

75. ADJOURNMENT

Due to the number of items on the agenda the Chairman suggested that Members may wish to consider deferring the remaining items for consideration at a future meeting. Councillor Dave Mackie proposed that the meeting be adjourned and this was agreed by the Committee. The Chairman said he would

liaise with the Facilitator concerning the need for an additional meeting to be arranged.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the meeting be adjourned; and
- (b) That an additional meeting of the Committee be arranged to consider the remaining items on the agenda

76. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.05 pm)

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Chairman