

LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
10 APRIL 2014

Minutes of the meeting of the Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold CH7 6NA on Thursday, 10 April 2014

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors Marion Bateman, Amanda Bragg, 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 and Rita Price

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors Carolyn Thomas (for David Williams)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Ann Minshull, Rebecca Stark and Reverend John Thelwell.

ALSO PRESENT: Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection and Leisure

CONTRIBUTORS: Cabinet Member for Education, Director of Lifelong Learning, Head of Schools Improvement Service, and Interim Facilities Services Manager

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

88. 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 Amanda Bragg and Phil Lightfoot (who were not school governors) declared an interest as school governors.

89. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 March 2014 were submitted.

Accuracy

Page1: the name 'Brownwen' to be amended to read 'Bronwen'.

National Model for Regional Working on School Improvement

Mr. David Hytch asked that a copy of the 2014/15 Business Plan for GwE be provided to Mrs. Rebecca Stark and other co-opted Members who could not access the document in the Members Library.

Annual School Modernisation Report

Councillor David Mackie referred to his comments on page 4 of the minutes and said that his concern had been that building a new school at John Summers the same size as the current school, would not address the issue of surplus places. Councillor Davie Mackie also asked that the following comment be added to minute number 74: "that 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 Marion Bateman asked that her concerns around the new hub being over-reliant on the ambitious Northern Gateway plan in Deeside be included as part of her comments on minute number 74.

RESOLVED:

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

90. REGIONAL SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPROVEMENT SERVICE (GWE)

The Chairman welcomed and introduced Mr Huw Foster Evans, Chief Officer of GwE and invited him to give a presentation on the Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service (GwE).

The Director of Lifelong Learning introduced a report to provide an update on progress with the development of GwE. He provided background information and reported that the Minister for Education had recently supported the GwE business plan for 2014-15. He advised that Flintshire and all North Wales Local Authorities were committed to working collaboratively with each other and the Welsh Government to ensure that children and young people were given the best possible start in life and achieve life skills of the highest standards. The commitment was embodied in local improvement plans and the development of the National Model for regional working on school improvement.

Mr. Huw Foster Evans gave a presentation on progress with development of the service which had been in place for 12 months. The main points of the presentation were:

- The national context
- The regional context
- Supportive challenge
- Challenging support
- School to school support as the main driver

- Structures
- Shared accountability
- PISA tests, skills and the national expectations
- Leadership
- HR support
- Governor support

The Director advised that GwE was commissioned by and accountable to North Wales local authorities including Flintshire. This was embodied in the developing mode for performance planning and reporting (including to scrutiny) , in the participation of the Cabinet Member, Chief Education Officer and school representatives, in service governance, in the participation of commissioning officers, and delivery officers in local scrutiny.

The Cabinet Member for Education spoke in support of GwE and said he was confident of progress and that the Service would continue to provide better outcomes for pupils in Flintshire schools.

Mr. Evans provided detailed responses to the written questions which had been submitted prior to the meeting by Councillor Ian Dunbar and Mr. David Hytch. Councillor Ian Dunbar asked that written responses to the questions be circulated to the Committee following the meeting. A copy of the questions and the responses are attached at Appendix 1.

The Chairman invited members to raise any further supplementary questions.

Councillor Paul Shotton commented on the educational results achieved in Scotland and asked if GwE could look at how these had been gained. Mr. Evans advised that he would be meeting with Professor Graham Donaldson on 1st May 2014, who had previously undertaken a personal review of teacher education in Scotland, concerning a review Professor Donaldson would be carrying out on behalf of the Welsh Government on the assessment of the national curriculum. He commented on the need to develop a more positive rather than negative language in terms of the education services in Wales and the accomplishments achieved.

Councillor Stella Jones referred to the mission statement for GwE and commented on the possibility of duplication of roles between GwE and Flintshire County Council.. She expressed further concerns in relation to the decisions made by GwE and adoption of a “one size fits all approach”. She referred to the need for effective scrutiny by individual scrutiny committees and more input in decision making. Mr. Evans and the Director acknowledged the points raised and responded to the concerns. The Director gave an assurance that there would be no duplication of work and commented on the importance of providing a streamlined coherent service. He also gave an assurance that no decisions would be taken about how services would change without an individual business case being considered. Regarding Scrutiny’s involvement in the decision making process, the Director of Lifelong Learning confirmed that reviews to the annual delivery plan during the year would be incorporated into the Committee’s forward work programme.

The Cabinet Member for Education commented that the duties and responsibilities between GwE and Flintshire County Council had previously been agreed with Members during consideration of the Service Level Agreement.

Councillor Dave Mackie referred to the views expressed by the Committee in previous meetings that whilst acknowledging the need for a regional service members did not want standards to reduce. He said his concern was that a year had passed and Flintshire schools had not had the same level of service that they had been provided with previously. In his response the Director referred to the lengthy and detailed discussions which had taken place with Members around the development of the service and the national model. He said there was agreement on a need to improve opportunities for learning and outcomes in Flintshire schools. He explained that schools still had access to specialists in relation to core subjects but that the curriculum advisor role that existed in the past was now being undertaken by the Head of Department in schools working in collaboration with other schools.

In response to the queries raised by Councillor Nancy Matthews around commissioning, the Director advised that there was the facility to decommission, however, all 22 local authorities had signed up to work through a regional consortia and there would be a consequence if an individual local authority was to withdraw.

Mrs Rita Price made a number of observations in relation to sharing of good practice amongst schools and referred to a culture of encouraging schools to compete with each other. She also said there was little reference to the fact that schools were different and there was no regard to what diocesan schools were.

Councillor Nigel Steele Mortimer expressed the view that whilst it appeared GwE worked well in secondary schools, in his view this was not replicated in the primary sector. He commented on the level of reassurance which had been provided to teachers under the old system through direct contact with curriculum subject advisors. He said the new system had “gaps” in provision and that primary schools were left to bring in services as required. Mr. Evans acknowledged the concerns raised and referred to the reintegration of some of the services and that the perceived “gap” would be filled in a year or two.

The Chairman referred to monitoring visits of the System Leaders and asked how GwE ensured consistency across all local authorities. He asked whether the four regional consortiums would be subject to Estyn Inspections and for further information around the procedures in place to ensure local authorities were informed of areas of concern.

During discussion Mr. Evans responded to the questions raised by the Chairman regarding the monitoring of System Leaders visits and consistency across all local authorities, inspections of the consortia by Estyn, the procedure for raising any concerns with a Local Authority and the process for Members to raise any concerns with GwE. The Chairman suggested that the Chief Officer of GwE be invited to attend a meeting of the Committee annually and that future presentations include case studies of actions taken by GwE to improve education

in schools in Flintshire. The Chairman also suggested that a special meeting of the Committee be arranged in the future to address this item.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Huw Foster-Evans for his attendance and for his detailed responses to Members' questions.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the update be received and the planned development of the regional service within the framework provided by the National Model for regional working on school improvement be supported; and
- (b) That scrutiny incorporates the school improvement business plan for Flintshire and outcome reporting, envisaged within the National Model, into its annual work programme.

91. VARIATION IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman indicated there would be a change in the order of the agenda and that the item on the Facilities Review would be brought forward.

92. FACILITIES REVIEW

The Interim Facilities Services Manager introduced a report to update on the implementation of various service improvement initiatives designed to ensure the Facilities Services Unit complemented 21st Century Schools and met the legislative requirements of the Welsh Government's Appetite for Life health and wellbeing programme. He advised that a comprehensive breakdown of the service improvements under each of the headings of Efficiency, Innovation, Investment and Growth was appended to the report.

The Interim Facilities Services Manager gave a presentation on Flintshire Primary Branding. The main points of the presentation were:

- Current situation
- The brief
- Brand proposals
- Logo/Brand
- Brand Values
- Brand values for Fuel up 205
- Brand extension
- In the schools: the Promotional Campaign

He also outlined future promotional campaigns to encourage the take up of school meals and commented on a Healthy Food week 1st to 7th June 2014, a cookery competition between Primary and Secondary Schools, participation in the Mold Food Festival, and the compilation of a School Cook's recipe book. The Interim Facilities Services Manager also commented on work undertaken to engage and promote local produce and suppliers

Councillor Paul Shotton said he was pleased to note the increased uptake in Free School Meals for those eligible.

Councillor Marion Bateman expressed concern that pupils were being given too much choice. She also asked how much the Flintshire Primary Branding had cost. The Interim Facilities Services Manager explained the cost per school of the branding package and commented on today's sophisticated Infant/Junior market. He referred to the importance of healthy eating and the need to make lunchtimes an integral part of the school day with the aim to improve attainment and development.

Members expressed their thanks to the Interim Facilities Services Manager and his team for their hard work and achievements. The Director and Cabinet Member for Education also expressed their appreciation to the Interim Facilities Services Manager for the service improvements and efficiencies, and the increased income and uptake of school meals. The Committee expressed best wishes to the Interim Facilities Services Manager for the future.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and further updates provided on a quarterly basis.

93. IMPROVEMENT PLAN MONITORING REPORT

The Director of Lifelong Learning introduced the 2013/14 Mid Year Improvement Plan Monitoring Report relevant to the Committee for the period October to December 2013. He 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.

In response to a query from Councillor Nancy Matthews concerning the support provided to schools in use of the School Effectiveness Grant and Pupil Deprivation Grant, the Head of Schools Improvement Services explained that the Authority's purpose was to ensure that school's adhered to the grant criteria.

Mr. David Hytch commented on the reduction in the repairs and maintenance budget for educational assets and the information that the programme to address repairs and maintenance was having a positive effect on the repairs backlog. He referred to the increases in repair and maintenance as building age and conditions continued to deteriorate despite the replacement of some old schools by new removing some of the backlog. The Director acknowledged the points raised and explained that he would wish to see further progress in the removal of backlogs, however, capital programmes were under pressure, and he commented on the significant impact in relation to the reduction in backlog achieved so far through school modernisation, reorganisation, and new build. He also highlighted the future actions and arrangements to control the risk.

Councillor Nancy Matthews referred to the consultations undertaken on post-16 provision and asked if a report on post 16 outcomes, to include student drop-out rates, be submitted to the Committee in September 2014. The Director agreed to provide a report.

Mrs Rita Price referred to the request for comparisons to be made between Flintshire secondary schools and post 16 colleges and asked that preliminary work be undertaken with the colleges in Flintshire when seeking information about their performance.

In response to a query from Councillor Amanda Bragg concerning statutory objections the Director explained that a large number of statutory notices had been issued. Ministerial adjudication had been received in relation to the Elfed High School, however, Ministerial approval was still awaited in relation to other statutory notices issued.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That the Director provides a report on post-16 outcomes; and
- (c) That the Director provides data on the number of students who start A level courses and then “drop out”.

94. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Housing and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the Forward Work Programme of the Committee. She informed Members that the next meeting of the Committee scheduled for 15 May 2014 would be held at Elfed High School, Buckley. It was agreed that Members would arrive at the School at 1.30 pm in order to be given a tour of the building before the Committee meeting started at 2.00 p.m. She also advised that a joint meeting of the Lifelong Learning and Social & Health Care Overview and Scrutiny Committees had been arranged for Friday, 2 May 2014.

Members reviewed the current programme and agreed that the following items be considered at the next meeting on 15 May 2014:

- Lifelong Learning Directorate Plan 2014/15
- Development and resource Service Plan
- School Improvement Strategy
- Culture and Leisure Plan
- Apprenticeships, Training and Development opportunities

It was also agreed, in line with previous discussions, that the following items be added to the forward work programme:-

- Post 16 results to include information on student drop-out rates
- Education Repairs and Maintenance Budget
- Update report on School Modernisation

RESOLVED:

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

95. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press or public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.45 pm)

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Chairman