

LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
26 MARCH 2015

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, 26 March 2015

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors Marion Bateman, Adele Davies-Cooke, Ian Dunbar, Ron Hampson, Mike Lowe, Dave Mackie, Nancy Matthews, Vicky Perfect, Paul Shotton and Nigel Steele-Mortimer

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Janine Beggan, David Hytch and Reverend John Thelwell

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors Bateman (for Colin Legg) and Carolyn Thomas (for Ray Hughes)

APOLOGIES: Councillors: Kevin Jones (Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection) and Phil Lightfoot. Rebecca Stark..

CONTRIBUTORS:

Cabinet Member for Education, Chief Officer (Education and Youth), Primary Link Officer, and Head of Inclusion Service

IN ATTENDANCE:

Housing and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

61. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

No declarations of interest were made.

62. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 26 February 2015 were submitted.

Accuracy

It was pointed out that the meeting had been held in Mold Alun High School, not County Hall as indicated in the minutes.

Matters arising

The Chair advised that it was not his intention to allow statements to be read out at future meetings on behalf of a Cabinet Member if a Cabinet Member was unable to attend a meeting.

RESOLVED:

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

63. SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report on the Council's current School transport Policy. He provided background information and referred to the main considerations which were detailed in the report.

The Chief Officer explained that the Authority made a higher level of transport provision than legally required which was reflected in the Council's high expenditure on discretionary transport provision. He drew attention to the requirements on the Authority to provide statutory transport provision for children of compulsory school age whose home was over two miles from the nearest suitable primary school and three miles from the nearest suitable secondary school.

The Chief Officer advised that it was the responsibility of parents to get their child to and from school where they did not qualify for free school transport and to apply for free transport where their child qualified.

During discussion the Chief Officer responded to the comments and queries raised by members and outlined the definition of nearest "suitable school" and the distance criteria for provision of free transport.

In response to a query raised by Councillor Nancy Matthews concerning hazardous routes and how a safe route was defined, the Chief Officer advised that the Authority made provision for free transport for pupils where the route to school was determined to be hazardous following consultation and assessment by Highways colleagues.. He agreed to circulate information to the Committee on the criteria used when assessing routes.

Councillor Matthews also referred to the cost of transport where pupils/students did not qualify for free or concessionary provision and suggested that a standard charge be made so everyone paid the same. She asked if students could access fees charged by public transport providers and arrange a contract fee. The Chief Officer explained that pupils/students were eligible to a discount when accessing public transport and referred to a national scheme for Post-16 transport provision which was being rolled out and advised that every young person would be able to access discounted fares.

Mr. David Hytch asked what steps the Authority was taking to promote sustainable modes of travel. The Chief Officer commented on the work being undertaken with schools and colleagues in the Highways section to develop projects and cited the "walking bus" scheme as an example. The Cabinet Member for Education explained that the Authority promoted healthy living and actively encouraged schools to participate in such schemes through the healthy schools initiative. The Chief Officer agreed to provide the Committee with information on sustainable modes of travel and the walking bus programme.

Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer proposed that a Task and Finish Group be set up to review the current school transport policy and report back to the Committee. The proposal was seconded by Councillor David Mackie.

The Cabinet Member for Education commented that he was not aware of any specific issues raised which would require consideration by such a Group. He reiterated the Chief Officers advice that the Authority provided a higher level of transport provision than legally required and commented that in the current financial circumstances other Authorities were reviewing and changing or reducing their school transport provision.

Councillors Ian Dunbar and Paul Shotton agreed with the views expressed by the Cabinet Member and spoke in support of the current policy on School Transport.

The Chairman asked members to vote on the proposal put forward by Councillor Steele-Mortimer and when put to the vote the proposal was lost.

RESOLVED:

That the School Transport Policy be noted

64. EDUCATION FOR ALL

The Head of Inclusion Service introduced a report to advise on the proposed activity to improve outcomes for pupils and maintain a higher number of placements within Flintshire's mainstream settings. She provided background information and advised that activities had been undertaken with headteachers and school-based staff to identify the difficulties which resulted in children and young people failing to maintain their mainstream placements.

The Head of Service referred to the key considerations which were detailed in the report and advised that access to an appropriate curriculum within the secondary setting was considered essential to maintaining engagement and securing better pupil outcomes. Additional funding to support access to a more personalised curriculum was potentially available through the Education Improvement Grant and the European Social Fund. Access to appropriate support was also integral to ensuring improved outcomes.

The Head of Service advised that the current provision offered through Flintshire's pupil referral units was in need of review to ensure that it fully complemented the role of mainstream schools and provided a range of specialist interventions to support the maintenance of school placements.

During discussion the Head of Service responded to the comments and questions raised by members and referred to the need for early intervention to identify and track youngsters who were at risk of leaving their mainstream placement. She also commented on the range of opportunities to ensure that young people were accredited to gain employment going forward.

During further discussion it was agreed that a Task & Finish Group would be created to help develop and evaluate policy options and proposed programmes. The Housing and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator advised that a report, outlining the proposed terms of reference and seeking nominations to the Task & Finish Group would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the action plans specific to the Education & Youth Improvement & Modernisation Strategy be presented to the Committee, when funding sources have been confirmed and programmes of activity mapped out;
- (b) That a Task & Finish Group be created to help develop and evaluate policy options and proposed programmes; and
- (c) That a report, outlining the proposed terms of reference and seeking nominations to the Task & Finish Group be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

65. NATIONAL MODEL FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report to provide an update on the alignment of working arrangements in North Wales with regard to the National Model For School Improvement.

The Chief Officer provided background information and referred to the areas of work to be addressed in order to be in alignment with the National Model for Regional Working. He explained that each of the areas identified should be considered to be developed under a regional approach. The options had been considered by a Joint Committee for the joint service in March 2015 and the recommendations were as detailed in the report.

The Primary Link Officer reported that she had attended a meeting of the North Wales Senior Primary Officers who had responsibility for Foundation Phase. The purpose of the meeting was to provide a mode to the Directors of Education Strategic Group and GwE to align the Foundation Phase into the National Model for School Improvement.

In response to a query raised by Councillor Paul Shotton, the Chairman suggested that an update report on matters related to the Foundation Phase and transition to the regional service be added to the Committees Forward Work Programme for a future meeting.

During discussion the Chief Officer responded to the questions and concerns raised by Councillor Nancy Matthews around teacher workload, and the provision of effective Human Resources support. The Chief Officer acknowledged the points made and referred to the increased level of casework due to the restructuring of schools through the school modernisation programme. He explained that work was in progress to develop knowledge and experience of

school casework amongst more HR colleagues within the Authority to enable them to provide advice to schools.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee support the direction of the work being undertaken to align Flintshire and other partner authorities in North Wales with the National Model in respect of the work streams identified in the report.

66. IMPROVEMENT PLAN MONITORING REPORT

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report on the 2014/15 Improvement Plan Monitoring Report relevant to the Committee. The report covered the period October – December 2014.

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) advised that the following Improvement Plan sub-priority reports were attached to the report for the Committee's consideration:

- Modernised and High Performance Education
- Apprenticeships and Training

The Chairman invited members to raise questions.

During discussion the Chief Officer responded to the comments and queries raised by members and commented on the range of projects across the County and North Wales region to deliver skills development programmes in partnership with local employers to meet the skilled based needs for the future.

Councillor Paul Shotton welcomed the appointment of a full-time co-ordinator for literacy and numeracy.

Councillor Nancy Matthews welcomed the report and the improved format.

RESOLVED:

That the reports be noted.

67. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Housing and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the forward work programme of the Committee. She informed Members that it had been agreed that the next meeting of the Committee on 30 April, would be held at Hawarden High School. The Facilitator explained that an e-mail setting out the arrangements for a short tour of the School would be sent to Members prior to the meeting.

Members considered the Forward Work Programme and it was agreed that the following items would be considered at the next meeting:

- Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service (GwE)

- Medium Term Plan for Libraries
- Draft Improvement Plan 2015/16

Councillor Ron Hampson suggested that the Committee receive a report on the recent press articles about the £3m spent on sickness for teachers. It was agreed that a short briefing note on this matter together with a copy of the Cabinet report which detailed the level of sickness be circulated to the Committee for information.

Councillors Nancy Matthews and Carolyn Thomas suggested that a report on prudential borrowing for the schools repairs and maintenance budget also be brought forward from the meeting scheduled to be held on 16 July 2015 to the meeting on 30 April 2015. The Chairman agreed with the suggestion.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be noted.

68. 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 2.00pm and ended at 3.33pm)

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Chairman