

EDUCATION AND YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28 APRIL 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Thursday, 28th April, 2016

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors: Marion Bateman, Paul Cunningham, Andy Dunbobbin, David Healey, Colin Legg, Phil Lightfoot, Dave Mackie, Vicky Perfect and Nigel Steele-Mortimer

SUBSTITUTIONS:

Councillor: Clive Carver for Adele Davies-Cooke and Gareth Roberts for Nancy Matthews

CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Janine Beggan, David Hytch, Bernard Stuart and Rev. John Thelwell

APOLOGIES:

Councillor Peter Curtis
Rebecca Stark.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Cabinet Member for Education – Councillor Chris Bithell and Chief Officer (Education and Youth)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

76. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

No declarations of interest were made.

77. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3 December 2015 and 15 March 2016 had been circulated to Members with the agenda.

RESOLVED:

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

78. POST 16 EDUCATION CENTRE

The Chairman introduced Mr. Alex Thomas (Headteacher of the Post 16 Education Centre) and Mr. Ian Dickson (Deputy Principal of Coleg Cambria) to the Committee.

Mr. Thomas provided a detailed presentation which covered the following areas:-

- Deeside Sixth Form Centre
- Development of Curriculum so far
- Development of staffing
- Developing partnerships with schools
- What could be developed
- Current applications

Mr. Thomas explained that the £15m centre would provide enhanced A level provision and was a joint development between Coleg Cambria, local partner schools and Flintshire County Council. The ultimate aim of the centre was to be the best A level provider in the United Kingdom. The process started some time ago to plan the best A level provision and meetings which included all partner schools helped to plan and develop the strategic route and to share good ideas and best practice. Mr. Thomas said that it was important that there was a smooth transition into the new centre from local schools and a commitment had been given that the students would have the same teacher in year 13 as they had in year 12. He circulated a guide about the Sixth Form centre and advised Members that 29 subjects were on offer to the students and spoke of the importance of including subjects that had run successfully in schools along with addressing the areas that employers were looking for. It was anticipated that the number of subjects would increase to approximately 40 as the centre grew. Mr. Thomas provided details about the staff appointed to work at the centre and commented on the open evenings and parents evenings that had taken place. He advised that nearly all 11-16 schools were actively engaged and it was hoped that opportunities to share information with all Flintshire High Schools could be developed. Mr. Thomas explained that 205 applications had been received for places at the centre from September 2016 with 171 being active applications and the remainder being for students who had decided to study elsewhere or did not meet the entry criteria.

In response to a query from Councillor David Healey about particular aspirations, Mr. Thomas spoke of the enrichment programme which would provide guidance and support to enhance the student's applications for universities. Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer asked about the maximum number of students that the centre could accommodate and the target for next year. In response, Mr. Thomas said that that maximum was 750 and it was anticipated that there would be approximately 250 pupils in the first year. Councillor Colin Legg expressed concern that French was the only language offered at the Centre and suggested that German, Chinese and Russian could be languages that could be offered. Mr. Thomas noted the comments and agreed with the idea to increase the number of languages offered but said that currently only Welsh and French were undertaken at A level in the consortium schools and of the 205 applications, two students had applied for French and one for Welsh. In response to a further comment from Councillor Legg about possible small class sizes, Mr. Thomas said that as the centre grew, additional courses would be offered. Councillor Paul Cunningham concurred about the need to offer languages other than Welsh and French and referred in particular to the Northern Gateway project.

Mr. Dickson recognised the importance of building a strong curriculum and spoke of guidance provided by other sixth form providers on best practice and good ideas for curriculums, particularly in the first year. He added that it was vital

not to overprovide and under deliver on subjects offered. He suggested that there needed to be clear dialogue between schools and full collaboration between all five schools in the consortium. He said that it was vital that this was a partnership project and curriculum and in referring to the Northern Gateway said that those involved with the Sixth form centre were aware of the language needs of employers and welcomed the opportunity to be able to consider expanding the number of languages offered as soon as possible.

Mr. David Hytch thanked Mr. Thomas for the presentation and welcomed the continuity of teaching from year 12 to year 13. He spoke of his previous involvement with the management of the consortium and the problems that had been identified which included financial parameters. He also suggested that Spanish should be included as an option and spoke of the importance of ensuring that provision and take up of languages did not decline.

The Chairman expressed concern that the document was written in the present tense and queried how the sixth form centre could be an active partner in the Seren Network when the centre was not yet open. Mr. Thomas took on board the comments about the document. He added that some students, who were already members of the Seren Network, were taking subjects within the consortium. The Chairman said that it had been suggested that the centre was a successor to the consortium arrangements currently in place and sought clarification on how scrutiny of the schools within the consortium could be compared with the results from the Deeside sixth form centre. In response, Mr. Thomas spoke of the ability to be able to compare and contrast in terms of attainments and the Chief Officer (Education and Youth) said that there was an open commitment to share data which could include information being provided to this Committee.

Mr. Dickson provided details of the governance arrangements at the new centre and of the advisory group which was chaired by Councillor Chris Bithell and included representatives from each of the partner schools, Coleg Cambria and Flintshire County Council.

The Chairman asked for information on the Seren Network and extra curricula activities that may be offered at the sixth form centre and whether they would include acting, football or athletics and queried whether the full range that were offered at the schools would be available. Mr. Thomas explained that the Seren Network supported high achievers to reach their academic potential. A wide range of extra curricula activities would be offered and Mr. Thomas spoke of the appointment of a dynamic drama teacher and the very successful football team at Coleg Cambria. Some activities would be offered to the whole of Coleg Cambria and some would be specific to the sixth form centre and had been designed to enhance the skills of the students through a programme of super-curricular activities.

Councillor Clive Carver spoke of the importance of including German as a language that could be offered to students. He also referred to page 10 where it was reported that Deeside Sixth life was likely to be different to what students had been used to at school. Mr. Thomas said that the biggest difference between year 11 at school and year 12 at the hub was that students would be expected to carry out independent study, but he added that there would also be a

number of similarities to school life too. He explained that if a student was at another sixth form and were undertaking three or four A levels, they would expect to study for 20 hours per week. At the hub, this amount would increase to 25 hours because it would include five hours independent study which the student could undertake on site. Councillor Carver also sought clarification about the number of labs at the centre and was advised by Mr. Thomas that there were four science labs with one being a super lab which had the feel of an industry style lab and the remaining three being for biology, chemistry and physics. He added that another difference at the centre would be that the students would be asked to call him Alex rather than Mr. Thomas.

Councillor Dave Mackie sought clarification on the entry criteria and in response, Mr. Thomas said that pupils who passed an exam would transfer through to the hub but those who failed would be provided with advice and guidance on their options. Councillor Mackie also asked about the figures provided as part of the presentation and raised concern that the hub had been built for 750 students but it was anticipated that there would only be 250 in the first year. He referred to meetings of the Committee held earlier in the day about the closure of two primary schools and sought clarification on the 500 vacant places expected at the hub. Mr. Dickson responded that in the past, there had been a temptation for sixth form centres to take as many students who had expressed an interest in studying an A level without much chance of achievement. However, it was felt that it was important that the proposed entry level criteria was applied consistently for the project to succeed. On the issue of figures, Mr. Dickson said that the data was taken from the Council's website for year 10 pupils in February 2015. He added that many discussions had taken place about the number of students that could be accommodated at the centre and, following consultation with other providers, it had been identified that students would travel for high quality provision and therefore it was hoped that the centre would attract students from far beyond Flintshire. On the entry criteria for the hub, Mr. Thomas explained that students needed six grade Cs at GCSE and added that this was based on the required criteria at other sixth form centres. However, he explained that there may be some issues that could be taken into account when considering whether a student could attend the hub or not.

Councillor Andy Dunbobbin welcomed the provision of the sixth form centre which was in his ward and spoke of his pride for the hub which he felt would be a great success. He asked if discussions had been held with David Lock Associates on their 30 year vision of Deeside and whether the issue of the advanced manufacturing centre had been considered. Councillor Dunbobbin also asked for further information on the number of pupils that had submitted applications for the hub from Blacon school. Mr. Dickson said that he did not have the information with him about the figures but would provide details following the meeting. He welcomed the support during the project and spoke of his pride about the development of the centre. He spoke of the discussions particularly on the local economy and the Seren Network and work was ongoing with developers and key manufacturers who were interested in the hub to maximise the number of recruits to their apprenticeship programmes.

Councillor Healey spoke of his support for the development but suggested that it would be difficult to enforce a rule that students undertaking independent study would need to stay on site. He felt that the students would go off site and

possibly bring the facility into disrepute if they did not act in accordance with the expectations of the hub. Mr. Thomas explained that the main ethos of the centre was education and said that he would be seen by the students at the start and end of the day so that they understood that they were at the centre to learn. Pupils would be encouraged to stay on site to study during independent study periods and he spoke of the facilities available and the staff that would be in place to provide advice and guidance if needed.

Some Members, including the Chairman and Councillors Dunbobbin and Marion Bateman, expressed a concern about the students being asked to refer to the Headteacher by his first name and suggested that it was more respectful to call him Mr. Thomas.

Mr. Bernard Stuart spoke of the structured way of life that post 16 learning offered and welcomed the comments that it was anticipated that pupils would travel from beyond Flintshire to attend the centre because of the numbers of sixth form places available in schools. Mr. Dickson said that it was never intended to reduce the number of students undertaking sixth form provision in schools by the opening of the hub and said that it was important that the pupils had a choice.

Councillor Chris Bithell, the Cabinet Member for Education, reiterated the comments to provide sixth form pupils with a choice of where to study. He commented on discussions that had taken place with schools on their concerns. On the issue of numbers attending the centre, it had been realised that the full cohort would not be attending in the first year but it was important to build on numbers in forthcoming years. Councillor Bithell advised that he was a Member on the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) Committee which some Councillors on this Committee were also Members of, and he welcomed the inclusion of Religious Studies in the list of subjects available to study at A level at the hub. He suggested that a visit could be made to the centre by the Committee once it was open to allow Members to see what was on offer to the students.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Thomas and Mr. Dickson for their attendance and presentation.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be received.

79. THE IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2016/17

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report to provide the Committee with relevant sections of the Improvement Plan for consultation and input, along with the proposed targets for the national performance indicators.

He highlighted page 21 on the sub priority of Apprenticeships and Training and said that this was a key indicator for young people in education and training. He also referred to the impact of improving learning provision and opportunities to achieve better learner outcomes under the sub priority Modernised and High Performing Education. The Chief Officer commented about working effectively with partners across the region to secure efficiency and improved outcomes from

educational improvement programmes. He also spoke about the role of Councillors in making more efficient use of education resources through School Modernisation.

Councillor David Healey referred to the priority to reduce the impact of poverty and of the issue of the connection between free school meals and under performance and queried whether there were any schools in Flintshire that went against this trend. The Chief Officer suggested that this issue could be raised at the meeting in July when a report on GWE was to be considered. He added that a range of strategies had been put in place that had had an impact on individual learners but there were no schools where the gap had been completely eradicated; this still remained a priority.

Mr. David Hytch raised concern on apprenticeship schemes because of the impact of the significant budget cuts on the Further Education sector. He welcomed the reference about the impact of cohorts and queried how many other schools were to be reviewed as part of the school modernisation programme. In response, the Chief Officer said that there were two area reviews being considered under the School Organisation Code, one in Nercwys and one involving Brynford, Lixwm and Rhos Helyg.

RESOLVED:

That the update be received.

80. QUARTER 3 IMPROVEMENT PLAN MONITORING REPORT

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report to present the monitoring of progress for the third quarter of 2015/16 focusing on the areas of underperformance relevant to the Committee.

He commented on the high level (RED) risk area in relation to the limited funding available to address the backlog of known repair and maintenance works in Education and Youth assets. The risk was showing a continuing pattern of red and the Chief Officer advised that significant issues were being noted in school inspections, particularly in relation to toilet provision.

Mr. David Hytch indicated that he had regularly raised the issue during the budget consultation process. It was reported that School Modernisation remained a key tool in enabling the Authority to invest appropriately in its school portfolio, and this would involve a reduction in schools within the Council's portfolio and a reduction of unfilled places.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

81. **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SCHOOL TRANSPORT TASK & FINISH GROUP**

The Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the report which set out the recommendations of the Group, for consideration by the Committee with a view to making recommendations to Cabinet.

The Facilitator explained that Cabinet had approved the engagement of JMP Consultants to assist with the assessment and delivery of the financial benefit that would be derived from the Integrated Transport Unit (ITU). The areas that had been identified as ones that could be considered for further policy development work were detailed in paragraph 1.05. The policy change options and any recommendations by the Committee would be presented to Cabinet following this meeting. The Task and Finish Group met on 14th March 2016 and had considered the breakdown of information for each policy change option and following a detailed presentation, had made some suggestions for Cabinet to consider when reviewing any operation and policy changes.

Councillor Dave Mackie expressed his disappointment at the proposals in the report and suggested that the Committee had not been given enough information on the impact that the proposals would have if they were implemented. Mrs. Janine Beggan concurred and, in referring to the earlier presentation about the sixth form hub, spoke of the possible impact on other sixth forms. The Chairman sought clarification on the current policy and suggested that if a child who was not a catholic wanted to attend St. Richard Gwyn High School they would need to pay for their transport but those attending the sixth form hub would not. The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) suggested that Members appeared to be confusing the denominational transport policy for 11 to 16 year olds and the post 16 transport policy. He added that the post 16 policy referred to the nearest suitable provider of the curriculum options.

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) said that the report accurately reflected the outcome of the Task and Finish Group. He added that the Group had considered a large amount of information and had declined to take a position on issues other than those identified in paragraph 1.08.

Mr. Bernard Stuart asked if the notes from the Task and Finish Group could be submitted to Cabinet as part of their consideration. He raised concern at the comment on denominational school transport referred to in paragraph 1.05 and said that following a ruling in May 2015 in relation to Welsh Medium Schools, denominational school transport could not be considered in isolation. The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) welcomed the suggestion to submit the notes to Cabinet and added that any proposals that Cabinet sought to take forward would need to take account of the judgements Mr. Stuart had referred to.

Following the discussions, the Chairman suggested that two additional resolutions be included as follows:-

'That the Committee request that Cabinet consider the impact of any change to the existing school network; and

'That the Committee request that if Cabinet agree to take forward any of the proposed policy changes, that the Committee be consulted on the changes with all necessary information'.

Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer suggested that JMP be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to explain their proposals. The Facilitator explained that as it was not known what the decision of Cabinet would be, the suggested additional resolutions would allow further information to be sought by the Committee if needed, which could include inviting JMP to attend.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the recommendations of the Task & Finish Group be endorsed and submitted to Cabinet for its consideration;
- (b) That the Committee request that Cabinet consider the impact of any change to the existing school network; and
- (c) That the Committee request that if Cabinet agree to take forward any of the proposed policy changes, that the Committee be consulted on the changes with all necessary information.

82. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the report to consider the Forward Work Programme for the Committee.

Following a request from the Chairman to hold a future meeting of the Committee in the new school in Holywell, the Facilitator confirmed that she would pursue this, along with the earlier invitation from Mr. Alex Thomas to visit the new Post 16 Education Centre.

The Facilitator detailed the items for consideration on the 9th June and 7th July 2016 meetings and added that Councillor David Healey had earlier requested the inclusion of an item on the connection between free school meals and underperformance. Councillor Marion Bateman also asked if a report on the issue of federations could also be considered at a future meeting. Mr. David Hytch sought clarification on when a report was to be received on incidents of arson, vandalism and burglaries in Flintshire schools. The Facilitator confirmed that she would discuss this with the officers concerned and send the report out to the Committee for information when it was available.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme, as amended at the meeting, be approved; and
- (b) That the Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

83. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 3.48 pm)

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Chairman