

EDUCATION AND YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

9 JUNE 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold CH7 6NA on Thursday, 9th June, 2016

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors: Marion Bateman, Paul Cunningham, Adele Davies-Cooke, Andy Dunbobbin, Phil Lightfoot, Dave Mackie, Nancy Matthews, Vicky Perfect and Nigel Steele-Mortimer

CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

David Hytch, Rebecca Stark and Bernard Stuart

APOLOGIES:

Councillors: David Healey and Colin Legg

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

Rev. John Thelwell

CONTRIBUTORS:

Senior Manager – School Improvement and Senior Manager – Inclusion & Progression

Senior Challenge Adviser for minute number 5 (Learner Outcomes)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

The Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator advised that the position of Chair for this Committee had been allocated to the Labour Group at the Council's Annual Meeting. The nomination from the Group for Chairman was for Councillor Ian Roberts and was therefore included in the agenda for the Committee to ratify the nomination. On being put to the vote, the nomination was agreed.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Ian Roberts be appointed as Chairman for the Committee for the municipal year.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

The Chairman sought nominations for the appointment of Vice-Chairman and Councillor Paul Cunningham nominated David Hytch. The nomination was duly seconded and, on being put to the vote, was agreed.

RESOLVED:

That Mr. David Hytch be appointed as Vice-Chairman for the Committee for the municipal year.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mrs. Rebecca Stark declared a personal interest in agenda items 6 (Learner Outcomes) and 7 (Skills for Life and Progression) as she was the parent of children in the education system in Flintshire.

Mr. David Hytch declared a personal interest in agenda item 6 (Learner Outcomes) as he was the parent of a year 12 pupil.

4. MINUTES

Prior to consideration of the minutes, Councillor Nancy Matthews congratulated the Chairman for his hard work in enabling the provision of the Urdd Eisteddfod to Flint. The Chairman thanked Councillor Matthews for her kind words and provided a detailed explanation of how this had been achieved. He said that it had been an extremely enjoyable event and had been attended by over 90,000 visitors.

Mr. Hytch explained that he had worked at the event and he suggested that a letter be sent from the Committee to congratulate Jeremy Griffiths and his team for their hard work which had ensured the success of the event. The Chairman suggested that Pam McLean also be thanked as she had allowed the land at the school to be used free of charge and that congratulations be passed on to the Head of Music at Maes Garmon for their involvement.

Councillor Paul Cunningham said that he had been impressed with the level of the choreography in the show 'Hairspray' and he felt that the music and dance was a delight to see and hear. Mrs. Stark echoed the comments and said that the number of children who participated was outstanding and she felt that the performances were fantastic. The excellent presentations by the Music Service were also highlighted.

Following the discussion, the Chairman suggested that an email be sent from the Committee to all schools in Flintshire to thank them for their tremendous achievements and that a letter be sent to Jeremy Griffiths, Pam McLean and Nia Wyn Jones, the Head of Music at Maes Garmon to congratulate them for their work.

The Senior Manager – School Improvement referred to a special event that was being arranged to recognise the key people who had made the event such a success. She spoke of a key strategic forum that was to be held in July 2016 and the hope that the success of the Urdd Eisteddfod would encourage more parents to consider the provision of Welsh Medium schools to educate their children even if the parents did not speak Welsh.

The Chairman also gave congratulations to Trelawnyd school which had won the prize in the competition for the best decorated school as part of the Urdd Eisteddfod.

The minutes of the Joint meeting of the Education & Youth and Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 24th March 2016 and the meetings of Education & Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 28th April 2016 at 10am, 29th April 2016 at 11.30am and 28th April 2016 at 2pm had been circulated to Members with the agenda.

ACCURACY

28th April 2016 -10am meeting

Mr. Hytch asked that the apostrophe be removed from the word 'Council's' in the fifth line on page 10.

He also suggested that the word 'considered' be added after the word 'been' in the final sentence of the first full paragraph on page 14.

MATTERS ARISING

28th April 2016 – 2pm meeting

The Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator referred to the minute on the Recommendations from the School Transport Task & Finish Group and confirmed that the report was to be considered by Cabinet on 21st June 2016; the decision would then be emailed to the Committee.

Mr. Hytch referred to the reference on page 27 about applications submitted for the hub from Blacon school and commented on the need to ensure that the cycleway from Shotton to Dock Road was extended to Coleg Cambria to allow pedestrian and cycle access. Councillor Andy Dunbobbin provided an update on his involvement with a bid for Groundwork to develop the route referred to by Mr. Hytch.

The Chairman thanked the Committee for the way they had conducted themselves during the difficult meetings on the closures of Ysgol Maes Edwin and Ysgol Llanfynydd. The Senior Manager – School Improvement provided assurance to Members of the work that was ongoing to ensure a smooth transition for the pupils, staff and parents to their new schools. Councillor Marion Bateman praised the staff at Sychdyn school to for their involvement in the transition process of the children from Ysgol Maes Edwin that would be moving to Sychdyn school.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That subject to the amendment detailed above, the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman; and
- (b) That a letter be sent to the following people, to thank them for their involvement and hard work during the Eisteddfod:-
 - Jeremy Griffiths, Head of Ysgol Gwynedd
 - Pam McLean, Head of Flint High School
 - Nia Wyn Jones, Head of Music at Ysgol Maes Garman

- Aled Marshman, Music Service Manager

5. LEARNER OUTCOMES

The Senior Manager – School Improvement introduced a report to provide Members with a summary of pupil attainment in statutory assessments across primary and secondary school phases for the school year 2014-15. The report also provided a summary of data in relation to attendance and exclusions.

She introduced The Senior Challenge Adviser who would be able to provide up to date information on each of the key stages.

The report mainly focussed on the performance at each of the key stages and identified that across the foundation phase, key stage 2 and key stage 3 showed a steady trend of improved performance at both the expected and higher than expected level. However, at key stage 4's main indicator level 2+, Flintshire's performance unexpectedly dipped in 2015 resulting in a drop in the local authority ranked position from 3rd in 2014 to 8th which was a worrying downward trend over the last two years.

The Senior Challenge Adviser explained that this year a new system had been introduced where schools set their targets at the beginning of the year in a uniform way, using an online system and there were three points in year where the projections were reviewed. The most up to date projections were based on the most recent information available for key stages 2, 3 and 4 using data from December 2015/January 2016. For Flintshire schools at Foundation Phase the latest projection was 87.1% which was an improvement on the figure for the previous year of 84%. There had also been a significant increase in the projection for key stage 2 which had increased from 87% to 89.5% and for key stage 3 the figure had increased from 80% to 84% to 87% over the past few years to 87.5% and it was expected that this rate could be maintained or increased in the following years. It was therefore felt that the schools could be fairly optimistic about the results that would be achieved when the outcomes were released in the summer. For the county as a whole, the trend had been of positive improvement and it was felt that this could be maintained.

Councillor Nancy Matthews said that the figures in the report were historical and she felt that it was very encouraging that the schools had continued to adapt their school development plans following the setting of their targets at the beginning of the year which had resulted in increases in the figures achieved.

The Senior Manager – School Improvement explained that the previous model used to set targets had not been fit for purpose and the introduction of this new system had given schools the confidence to know that the data would inform the target setting and would create more robust targets. She added that one benefit of the new system was that the targets were reviewed at various points throughout the year rather than never being reviewed once they had been set.

The Senior Challenge Adviser spoke of the work of the Challenge Advisers, and highlighted in particular how encouraging it had been to see to level of knowledge that teachers had on each cohort and the relevant interventions that had been put in place. It was felt that the assessments were

more robust. He spoke of the positive effects of ongoing work with schools and Challenge Advisers on the outcomes and he felt that Flintshire schools should be commended for their high level of integrity.

Mrs. Rebecca Stark was very heartened to hear how the work undertaken was not just about numbers but about the development of the pupils and she welcomed the reduction in the figures for the gender gap which she felt had shown a tremendous effort. She sought clarification on the figures which showed an underperformance at level 5 but an over performance at level 6. The Senior Manager – School Improvement said that there had been a general focus about ensuring pupils attained level 5 but she explained that the increase could be because schools were stretching the more able learners. She added that Welsh Government had now set the expectation of foundation phase pupils at outcome level 6.

Mr. Hytch welcomed the significant reduction by 8% in the foundation phase for language and communication where Welsh was a first language. The Senior Manager – School Improvement felt that this could be a reflection of the size of the cohort. Mr. Hytch also referred to the value added summary on page 47 which he said appeared to show a strong minus but was in fact a remarkable positive.

In referring to key stage 4, the Senior Challenge Adviser said that the figure for 2013 was 62.2% which had reduced to 61.9% in 2014 and had further reduced in 2015 to 60.6%. However, the secondary schools that had shown the largest reduction in percentage terms had still been ranked in the top benchmark quartile and were still in the top data entry for WG. He felt that this showed the high performance of some individual schools but added that performance in some schools was significantly above the target with some reporting much lower than expected results. He commented on three different strategy areas (English, Maths and read-across) and spoke of the work that was ongoing with schools by GwE to ensure that the appropriate strategies were in place. The projection for key stage 4 was 66.4% and the Senior Challenge Adviser said that if this was achieved, it would reflect the best ever performance for Flintshire.

Councillor Dave Mackie welcomed the new information that had been provided by the Senior Challenge Adviser and referred to the data in the form of graphs that used to be provided to Members. He referred to the 2014/15 data compared to 2013/14 information and said that this showed that Flintshire had dropped five or six places which he expressed significant concern about as no other county in Wales had dropped so many places. He had noted that when comparing all Councils, nine had dropped places in that time with five being in North Wales and he added that every authority in North Wales was lower in 2014/15 than in 2012/13 which he also raised concern about. Other consortiums had not dropped any places at all. Councillor Mackie spoke of the work undertaken by GwE which he felt was commendable but he queried the level of support in place. The Senior Manager – School Improvement concurred that the results were disappointing but said that some schools had difficulties with some cohorts and that as GwE had developed and become more established, there had been a shift from challenging targets to providing an appropriate level of support whilst still undertaking a necessary level of challenge and ensuring that the correct level of specialist expertise was in place.

The Senior Challenge Adviser said that the GwE remit had initially been determined by the local authority but as the service had progressed, different ways to provide support to the schools had been developed. He commented on the work of GwE to adapt strategies to ensure increases in performance and spoke of the reviews that would be undertaken in year on the assessment of how schools were progressing in line with the targets that had been set at the start of the year, and making adaptations as necessary.

Councillor Nancy Matthews said that it was important to remember the pupils when discussing targets and strategies and that what was in place needed to be for the benefit of the children. Mr. Hytch said that it was not always possible to compare data with other authorities because of the difficulties that may be experienced by individual cohorts. In response to a query from Mr. Hytch about the commentary on page 51 in the section on Results in Core Subjects, the Senior Manager – School Improvement said that she would check whether the information was from 2013/14 as reported as the figures in the table referred to 2014/15. Mr. Hytch also sought clarification on the figure of 93.2% in the table on page 49 for Key stage 4 outcomes as it showed a 10% increase but the ranking from 2014 to 2015 had remained unchanged. The Senior Challenge Adviser confirmed that the figure should be 83.2% and the ranking figure was therefore correct. Mr. Hytch also queried the drop in ranking from 14 to 18 for level 1 threshold; The Senior Challenge Adviser confirmed that these figures were correct. The Senior Manager – School Improvement said that even though the figure had improved, other authorities had also improved in comparison.

Mrs. Stark commented on the significant amount of work undertaken to assess each cohort and asked whether aspirational targets were set if it was anticipated that problems were to be expected because of reduced ability within a cohort. The Senior Manager – School Improvement said that schools were encouraged to set aspirational targets but based on an individual cohort rather than based on targets from previous years which historically been the case. This was one of the issues that would be discussed with the Challenge Adviser as part of the support package provided to schools. Mrs. Stark commended the work of GwE and in speaking of the importance of the work of the Challenge Adviser, she asked whether initiatives and best practices were shared to assist staff in other schools. The Senior Manager – School Improvement confirmed that the support was available to other schools which included resources available to assist them and said that diminishing resources were still a challenge but she added that head teachers had felt that the establishment of relationships between schools, which the Senior Challenge Adviser had been instrumental in, had assisted with this.

The Chairman spoke of an Estyn meeting that he had attended about GwE and the focus on key stage 4 and challenging targets set by schools.

On the issue of attendance, Councillor Matthews asked whether the targets set were too ambitious. The Senior Manager – Inclusion & Progression said that they were set as part of GwE targets and in some areas, the figures were not as high as expected. She spoke of the dip to 94.7% and explained that a forensic analysis had been undertaken to try and identify factors for low attendance. She detailed some of the reasons for absence and of the questions

raised by WG where they had queried where illness had been provided as a reason for absence. Councillor Paul Cunningham said that the weather could be a factor in absence due to illness and he detailed an example of when this could occur. The Senior Manager – Inclusion & Progression said that it was about ensuring the correct balance and spoke of a meeting that was to take place with Estyn about a framework for absence. However she added that it was important to monitor policies and practices in place and she gave assurance to Members that this issue was being considered in detail. She also provided information on the data that was collected which included a breakdown by the use of a code of why the absence had occurred.

Mr. Hytch said that the main aim was the issue of inclusivity and gave congratulations to the schools that worked successfully with communities and he highlighted the success of working with the traveller community to achieve an education for the children. He welcomed the unauthorised absence figure for Flintshire's primary and secondary schools which was the lowest figure in Wales.

Following a comment from Mr. Hytch about key stage 5, the Chairman reminded the committee that the figures for sixth form education would also include the data from the new sixth form hub in the future.

The Chairman thanked the Senior Challenge Adviser for his attendance.

RESOLVED:

That the attainment of Flintshire children and young people for the year 2014-15 be noted.

6. SKILLS FOR LIFE AND PROGRESSION

The Senior Manager – Inclusion & Progression introduced a report to provide an overview for Members regarding the provision available through Flintshire schools, to support learners with the required skills to move on successfully from compulsory education.

The Learning and Skills Measure (2009) enabled learners to follow a more individualised curriculum at Key Stage 4. The range of vocational options on offer, taken alongside the vocational qualifications, had been supplemented through the use of additional funding from the Flintshire 14-19 allocation of the Education Improvement Grant (EIG). This enabled the learners to access vocational courses through a range of external providers e.g. Coleg Cambria, North Wales Training and Motivational Preparation College for Training (Military Preparation). Careers and the World of Work (CWW) was also an integral part of the Key Stage curriculum and the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification provided further opportunities for learners to develop their work-related skills. Further support was available for learners who may need additional input to maintain their engagement in their education and to develop self-confidence, self-esteem and employability skills through the TRAC programme. This was a regional project funded through the European Social Fund and provided a range of bespoke provision and support for 11-19 year olds in school or further education settings.

Flintshire had a well-established 14-19 Network which oversees the strategic direction or provision for learners across Flintshire. The success of Flintshire's schools in preparing young people to move on effectively from compulsory education could be seen through the low NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) figures. Flintshire had maintained the lowest national rate of Year 11 NEET learners in Wales (1.3% for two consecutive years indicating that learners were well prepared and able to transition effectively into Post 16 education, training or employment). Similar measurements were taken for Year 12 and Year 13 learners and Flintshire figures were also very low for both of these categories (0.9% for Year 12 – 3rd lowest in Wales, and 2.6% for Year 13 – 2nd lowest in Wales).

The Senior Manager – Inclusion & Progression advised that schools were under pressure to offer a broad and balanced curriculum which ensured learners were literate and numerate, had access to a broad and balanced curriculum and left education with the required employability skills. These requirements placed a resource pressure on the available curriculum time to deliver these requirements and the breadth of curriculum also placed a resource pressure on schools in terms of appropriately trained and skilled staff who were able to deliver the curriculum.

Councillor Paul Cunningham welcomed the breadth of options available.

RESOLVED:

That the breadth of activity undertaken within schools to support learners to engage effectively in a suitable outcome, including employment, post 16 be recognised.

7. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

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

The Facilitator explained that the dates for the 2016/17 year had now been included following confirmation at the Annual Council meeting and items for consideration would therefore be populated for each meeting. The Quarter 4 Improvement Plan Monitoring Report had been due to be submitted to this meeting but would now be considered at the 7 July 2016 Committee along with an update on GwE which Huw Foster Evans would be attending to present.

The Forward Work Programme would be circulated to Officers to populate the plan for each meeting and would then be shared with Members of the Committee.

Councillor Nancy Matthews suggested that school modernisation be included as an item for a future meeting. Following a discussion, it was suggested that the 13th October 2016 meeting be held at the new Holywell High School and the meeting on 17th November 2016 be held at the Deeside Sixth Form Hub.

The Facilitator advised that the two reports showing on the Forward Work Programme as being for information ((i) Incidents of arson, vandalism and burglaries in Flintshire schools and (ii) Health & Safety in Schools) would be circulated to Members shortly.

RESOLVED:

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

8. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 3.42 pm)

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Chairman