

## **EDUCATION AND YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**5 FEBRUARY 2016**

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at Council Chamber, County Hall, Mold CH7 6NA on Friday, 5th February, 2016

**PRESENT: Ian Roberts (Chairman)**

Councillors Paul Cunningham, Peter Curtis, Andy Dunbobbin, David Healey, Phil Lightfoot, Dave Mackie, Vicky Perfect, Nigel Steele-Mortimer, and Carolyn Thomas

**CO-OPTED MEMBERS:** Janine Beggan, David Hytch, Rebecca Stark, Bernard Stuart, and Rev. John Thelwell

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Marion Bateman, Adele Davies-Cooke and Ray Hughes.

**SUBSTITUTIONS:** Councillors Mike Peers (for Nancy Matthews) and Gareth Roberts (for Colin Legg)

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillors Bernie Attridge, Glyn Banks and Tony Sharps

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Education, Chief Officer (Education and Youth), and Senior Manager, School Planning and Provision and Primary Link Officer

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator, and Committee Officer

The Chairman welcomed members of the public to the meeting and invited Officers to introduce themselves. He advised that the purpose of the meeting was to inform the Committee of the outcome of the consultation process for school organisational change at Ysgol Mornant Gwespyr, Picton. The Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator briefly explained that the role of the Committee was to scrutinise the Authority's policy and procedures and make recommendations where necessary, however, it was not a decision making body and it would be for the Cabinet to make the actual decision on the proposal to close Ysgol Mornant, Gwespyr Picton.

**58. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)**

The Chairman invited members of the Committee to make a declaration if they were school governors and a number of members so indicated.

**59. SCHOOL MODERNISATION - SCHOOL STANDARDS AND ORGANISATION ACT 2013 - YSGOL MORNANT, GWESPYR PICTON**

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report to inform the Committee of the responses from the statutory consultation period for the

proposal to close Ysgol Mornant, Gwespyr Picton. He advised that comments from the Committee were invited in advance of the Cabinet being requested to conclude on a formal proposal.

The Chief Officer provided background information and context and expressed praise for the Welsh Education Strategic Partnership (WESP) in Flintshire which had undertaken an ambitious agenda to improve Welsh and learning and social opportunities within the County during the last 5 years. He advised that the WESP had also delivered an innovative practice which had been adopted across the country. Estyn Inspectors had recognised the quality of practice within Flintshire as being a good example to share with other authorities. The Chief Officer commented on local examples of the work which had made a real impact in terms of opportunities for children and young people and referred to new areas of provision through working in partnership and new areas of provision in the primary sector.

The Chief Officer commented on the County's good track record for the education, development and training of its workforce and referred to the partnership between Coleg Cambria and Wrexham County Council and the substantial work programme which was greatly valued and recommended.

The Chief Officer commented on the period of uncertainty and anxiety that any educational review created and said that such controversial and emotive concerns were fully acknowledged by the Authority. He expressed praise for the children, parents, carers, staff and Governing Body of Ysgol Mornant which had worked constructively to seek solutions to the challenges faced by the school. The Chief Officer referred to the suggestion of a federation which had been put forward by Ysgol Mornant's Governing Body and a number of consultees and advised that the governing body had actively sought potential federal partners. He commented on the development opportunities for colleagues in educational provision as a result of constructive partnerships and explained that the Governing Body of Ysgol Croes Atti, Flint, had given careful consideration to how to support Ysgol Mornant in the way ahead but could not move forward with a Federation proposal although it would support Ysgol Mornant and partners in the future.

The Chief Officer expressed further praise for the Governing Body and the leadership team of Ysgol Maes Garmon, which were committed to supporting the community at Ysgol Mornant and to looking at opportunities for creating greater resilience with their partnership primary schools and exploring the feasibility of federation with Ysgol Mornant. The Chief Officer referred to the challenges faced by Ysgol Mornant and referred to the recommendation in the Hill review around how schools should work more collaboratively to address the challenges that smaller schools faced. He explained that federations provided the opportunity to work together to bring sustainability and resilience to small schools to enable them to raise standards in quality of education provision for children and young people. He commented on the benefits of federations in terms of increased opportunities to develop leadership, recruitment and retainment of staff, the sharing of expertise, resources and facilities, increased motivation, and improvement in the quality of transition to secondary education. He explained that federations did not bring financial savings to the Authority but could ease financial pressures in schools as resources and staffing could be shared and

deployed. However, in order for federations to come about there needed to be a commitment from willing governing bodies and from the local and wider community to be mobilised and to provide practical solutions and support.

Councillor Chris Bithell advised that the proposal to close Ysgol Mornant was put forward on the basis of criteria laid down in the Council's School Modernisation Strategy regarding unfilled places across the primary school portfolio, diminishing resource criteria, small school criteria and Welsh Government categorisation. He reiterated that the concerns and anxieties of pupils, parents, carers and staff were fully acknowledged, however, the Authority had a duty to provide high quality education which was affordable, sustainable, and in the best interests of children and young people for the future. He commented on the unprecedented cuts to the current and future level of funding faced by the Authority and said that every authority in England and Wales was in the same position of financial austerity. Councillor Bithell explained that the School population and capacity was lower than the national designation of a small school and school numbers did not meet the minimum requirements of primary school models as noted in the Council's School Modernisation Strategy. He also commented on the issue of sustainability concerning curriculum provision and the Welsh Government categorisation of standards.

Councillor Bithell referred to the issues raised during the consultation process which had highlighted the benefits of the school. He said that the impact that any proposed closure would have on the Welsh language and the community had been pointed out and it was evident that the school was highly regarded. Referring to the suggestion of a federation being formed, Councillor Bithell confirmed that the Authority would be willing to consider this option, however, a firm proposal had to be put forward for analysis and no such formal proposal had yet been submitted from a willing partnering school. He urged that serious consideration be given to this alternative.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Officer and Councillor Bithell for their presentations. He invited Councillor Glyn Banks, the local Member for the Ward, to speak.

Councillor Banks thanked the Committee for the opportunity to speak at the meeting. He expressed praise for the Welsh medium provision which had been made available by the Authority in other areas of Flintshire and commented on the need for similar provision to be made locally. He thanked all who had given their support in the campaign against the proposal to close Ysgol Mornant and praised parents, carers, children, and members of the public for their attendance and courtesy during the meeting.

Councillor Andy Dunbobbin proposed that the Committee recommends to Cabinet that it does not issue the Statutory Notice to Ysgol Mornant but works towards a federation of schools using Welsh medium education. The proposal was duly seconded by Councillor David Healey.

Councillor David Healey congratulated Officers on the fair and unbiased way they had presented the case for closure and said that the concept of federation brought hope and was worth exploring more fully. Councillors Nigel Steele-Mortimer and Peter Curtis also spoke in support of the proposal put

forward by Councillor Dunbobbin and commented on the importance of retaining and expanding local welsh medium language education and provision.

The Chief Officer explained that representatives of Ysgol Maes Garmon had stated that they wished to engage further with the Governors at Ysgol Mornant and the Council to explore ways in which Welsh Medium provision could be sustained in the area. A meeting of the Governing Body of Ysgol Maes Garmon would be held next week to consider the federation proposal with a willing partner(s). Ysgol Mornant Governing Body supported the proposal in principle. The Chief Officer outlined the next steps if an agreement was reached between the two governing bodies to pursue a federation proposal. He advised that officers would work closely with any willing schools to put together a package of resilience and sustainability to find solutions for the long term provision of welsh medium education in the area.

During discussion Officers responded to the further questions and concerns raised by Members around school admissions, alternative provision in other local schools, transition arrangements, school transport, early years provision, siblings and family groups, and before and after school care. Members also commented on the need to address local demand for welsh culture and language. The Chief Officer acknowledged and responded to the points raised and explained that the legislation in place in relation to school organisation applied to all schools; as did the admissions policy. He also advised that it was a matter of parental preference as to where parents decided their children were educated.

In response to a question from Mrs. Rebecca Stark, the Chief Officer confirmed that if the proposal to form a federation was not successful a further report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Chair thanked the Chief Officer, Senior Manager, School Planning and Provision, and Primary Link Officer, for their detailed responses to Members questions.

### **RESOLVED**

That the Committee recommends to Cabinet that it does not issue the Statutory Notice to Ysgol Mornant but works towards a federation of schools using welsh medium education.

## **60. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

There were forty-six members of the public and three members of the press in attendance

(The meeting started at 2.30 pm and ended at 4.08 pm)

.....  
**Chairman**

