

EDUCATION AND YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8 SEPTEMBER 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Room, County Hall, Mold at 2pm on Thursday, 8 September 2016

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors: Marion Bateman, Paul Cunningham, Andy Dunbobbin, David Healey, Dave Mackie, Nancy Matthews, Vicky Perfect, Nigel Steele-Mortimer and Carolyn Thomas

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Rebecca Stark, Bernard Stuart and Reverend John Thelwell

APOLOGIES: Councillors: Adele Davies-Cooke, Colin Legg, Phil Lightfoot and David Williams

Co-opted members: Janine Beggan and David Hýtch

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Education; Chief Officer, Education & Youth; and Senior Manager, School Improvement

IN ATTENDANCE: Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

15. URGENT ITEM

The Chairman advised that there would be an additional item on School Modernisation following consideration of the minutes of the previous meeting.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

There were no declarations of interest.

17. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7 July 2016 had been circulated to Members with the agenda.

Matters Arising

Minute number 11: Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service (GwE) - Councillor Dave Mackie referred to the information provided on the Development Programme training for Head Teachers and pointed out that only four of the participants were from Flintshire. The Senior Manager, School Improvement said that this would be pursued. She advised that attendance data had been sought to track those who were accessing the training and confirmed that all new Head Teachers in Flintshire had attended during the summer.

Councillor Mackie asked if anything could be done to help improve the take-up of this training. The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) provided

explanation on changes to the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) in Wales which was to become non-mandatory for future Head Teacher appointments. The Welsh Government was currently working on this Development Programme which would run from 2017.

Minute number 12: Education & Youth Portfolio Budget 2017/18 - the Facilitator agreed to re-send to Mrs. Rebecca Stark the Medium Term Financial Strategy report and minutes of the County Council meeting from September 2015 which had been circulated to the co-opted members.

RESOLVED:

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

18. ADDITIONAL ITEM - SCHOOL MODERNISATION

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) provided an update on School Modernisation. Following the closure of Ysgol Maes Edwin (Flint Mountain) and Ysgol Llanfynydd at the end of the summer term, he took the opportunity to thank the leadership teams of both schools for their support to learners, their families and the school staff. He also felt it was important to recognise the partnership working with primary schools in Sychdyn and Treuddyn.

On the federation between Ysgol Mornant and Ysgol Maes Garmon, work was continuing to support governors and build the partnership.

In respect of John Summers High School, the decision made by the Welsh Government (WG) was to remove 6th form provision from 31 August 2016 and to discontinue 11-16 provision which meant that the school would close from 31 August 2017. This was on condition that the Council would continue to work on the business case to WG to obtain approval for capital refurbishment works at Connah's Quay High School. The Chief Officer expressed disappointment that the decision had been issued by WG on a Bank Holiday weekend and assured Members that he had contacted the Head Teacher as soon as possible to make arrangements to meet with staff at the first available opportunity. The Chair of Governors had given a commitment that support would be provided through the transition period and the senior leadership team was contributing positively towards implementing the transition plan which had been shared during the decision-making process. Neighbouring schools had demonstrated a high level of ownership and commitment to collaborate with John Summers High School on the transition, including aligning examination options to support GCSE learners.

The Chief Officer would continue to update the Committee on progress with the transition arrangements and gave a reminder that decisions to close schools were subject to significant analysis and only where Members and the Minister felt satisfied that the continued quality of education would, at the very least, be maintained.

Councillor David Healey welcomed plans for curriculum alignment and asked whether the progress of Year 10-11 pupils who transferred to other schools could be tracked to compare their GCSE achievements with predicted outcomes. He referred to Members' concerns that the decision issued by WG

had been leaked on social media before local Members could be informed. The Chief Officer spoke about the well-established protocol used to inform key stakeholders of such decisions during term time, but said that everything possible was done given the timing of this particular decision by WG. He intended to write to WG to convey the challenges in supporting communities under these circumstances.

On tracking pupils' progress, the Chief Officer said that detailed analysis would be provided and that school systems were followed up where results differed significantly from tracking. The Level 2+ target set by John Summers High School was 40.3% to achieve a minimum of five GCSEs including English and Maths. Tracking throughout the year had decreased to 37.9% before Easter, with the final data at 22.4% much lower than the county average of 61.2% and that of a neighbouring secondary school at 65.8%.

Councillor Chris Bithell agreed that the timing of the decision issued by WG and subsequent leak on social media was unfortunate. Following this decision, the transition plan could now be implemented, incorporating the links with Connah's Quay High School.

On the closure of Ysgol Maes Edwin, Councillor Marion Bateman said that Ysgol Owen Jones in Northop should also be recognised for their work in helping with the transition of pupils.

Councillor Nancy Matthews requested details of the number of students enrolled on courses at the Deeside sixth form centre at the start of term along with the number of post-16 courses available. It was agreed that this information would be included in the next School Modernisation Update at the October meeting. Councillor Bithell commented that around 120 courses had been reported when the Committee was last updated. He went on to explain that previous enquiries about a particular course not being available had been due to a lack of demand.

In response to a query by Councillor Paul Cunningham, it was explained that the closure of Ysgol Maes Edwin meant that the building was now surplus to education requirements and would be under the guardianship of the Property Services team and the Council's Asset Board.

Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer sought an update on the area reviews in Brynford, Lixwm and Rhosesmor, and was informed that the results of the informal consultation would be reported to Cabinet.

Mrs. Rebecca Stark commended those involved in the transitional arrangements for school closures. She referred to the disparity in tracking and outcomes at John Summers High School and asked whether this could have been affected by any change in cohort numbers during the year and if the school had sought support from GwE. She felt that a review of the approach to tracking outcomes may be needed if a similar level of disparity was evident at other schools. The Chief Officer reminded the Committee that as a 'red' support school in the national categorisation model, John Summers High School was amongst the most vulnerable schools and was therefore subject to intensive support from GwE. In addition, vulnerable schools and those with significant performance

issues were identified and monitored by the School Performance Monitoring Group. He added that cohort numbers at John Summers High School had not changed significantly so this was not a major factor for the difference in outcomes.

Councillor Dave Mackie spoke about the need for additional support for Year 11 pupils who had moved to other schools during their final year.

The Senior Manager, School Improvement assured the Committee that tracking was part of the detailed transitional arrangements and that progress had been made in correlating curriculum subjects to ensure continuity of studies. As part of the arrangements, a meeting had been held to gather the concerns of parents of pupils at John Summers High School to enable the Council to collate and share the responses.

With reference to Ysgol Llanfynydd and other schools in general, Councillor Carolyn Thomas asked that the Property Services team work with local Members to seek alternative uses for empty buildings as opposed to boarding them up. She also asked whether funding was available to improve parking provision at the school campus in Treuddyn. The Chief Officer agreed to find out and respond separately on the parking issue.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

19. LEARNING FROM THE SCHOOL PERFORMANCE MONITORING GROUP

The Senior Manager, School Improvement introduced the annual update on the work of the School Performance Monitoring Group (SPMG) which sought to challenge underperforming schools and ensure that they received the necessary support from the Council and GwE to progress and improve learner outcomes.

The Senior Manager provided an overview of the criteria for monitoring schools and the approach taken by the SPMG. Feedback from school representatives and panel members reflected positively on outcomes from the process in seeking improvements and developing a greater understanding of the challenges facing schools. Whilst the work of the SPMG had contributed to improvements in primary school outcomes, there would be a greater focus on secondary schools in future.

Councillor Chris Bithell thanked Members of the Committee for their involvement on the SPMG in working with officers to provide the necessary challenge and support to schools.

Following comments by the Chairman about schools targeted by the Welsh Government (WG) Schools Challenge Cymru programme, the Chief Officer said that changes were due to be announced by WG.

Councillor David Healey referred to the need to improve outcomes for learners in receipt of free school meals across the UK and welcomed the positive

contributions made by Flintshire schools including that of Flint High School and the Connah's Quay consortium. The Senior Manager reported that schools were adapting positively to using the Pupil Deprivation Grant funding to support this cohort of pupils. In particular, at Key Stage 2 in primary schools and in the Foundation Phase, there was evidence that performance was levelling out between pupils from deprived backgrounds and those who were not. The Chief Officer advised that the Cabinet Secretary for Education had given an ongoing commitment to Pupil Deprivation Grant funding in recognition of the impact on learners.

Members praised the support from the Senior Manager and the team in relation to the tracking process.

As a panellist on the SPMG, Councillor Nancy Matthews had found the process to be interesting and particularly welcomed the informal nature of the discussions. Councillor Dave Mackie praised the level of detail within the report and commented that issues were sometimes outside the control of the school. Councillor Marion Bateman described the process on the panel as a two-way experience and encouraged more Members to participate.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report on the work undertaken by the School Performance Monitoring Group be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee endorse the School Performance Monitoring Group to continue to work in the same way with targeted schools in 2016-17.

20. IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2015/16 YEAR-END PROGRESS

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) presented the report to consider progress towards the delivery of the impacts set out in the 2015/16 Improvement Plan, focussing on the areas of under-performance relevant to the Committee during the fourth quarter/year end.

Councillor Nancy Matthews asked whether apprenticeships were tracked to establish outcomes. The Chief Officer referred to Flintshire's excellent record in engaging 16 year-olds in education, training and employment. Whilst there was no individual tracking mechanism and no national data on this, targeted local support and statistics were in place to monitor young people not engaged in training or employment.

The Chairman asked if data was available to indicate whether students at the new Deeside sixth form centre were completing their courses. The Chief Officer said that cohort numbers were available but individuals were not tracked. In response to a question from Councillor Matthews about tracking students' progress at the centre, the Chief Officer explained that achievement of high grades at 'A' level was an issue across the county and that the new centre aimed to provide a learning environment with quality teaching in which young people to thrive.

The Chairman asked that the next School Modernisation update report include data on which high schools the students at the Deeside sixth form centre had attended.

Mrs. Rebecca Stark questioned the risk on school places to meet future demands. The Chief Officer spoke about a range of factors including changing demographics, education contributions from larger local housing developments and the reconfiguration of classroom spaces according to need. He also said there was a need to balance school place planning within the national guideline on surplus places whilst maintaining reasonable access to education.

In response to a query from Councillor Paul Cunningham, there was discussion on the range of apprenticeship opportunities within the Council's programme and those in partnership with others. Reference was also made to the first Apprentice Fair held by the Council earlier in the year.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

21. PERFORMANCE REPORT 2015/16

The Committee received a report analysing the Council's progress towards the national indicators set by the Welsh Government (WG) during 2015/16. The information included trend analysis for indicators relevant to the Committee together with an overall view across the organisation.

Councillor Dave Mackie highlighted the need for final statements of special education need to be issued within the deadline. Councillor Chris Bithell explained that this indicator represented a small cohort and that the downward trend had been due to only one late report arising from staff absence.

Mrs. Rebecca Stark referred to the current financial challenges in local government and welcomed the Council's consistently good performance which had been recognised in the Wales Audit Office draft Annual Improvement Report for 2014/15.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

22. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

In presenting the current Forward Work Programme for consideration, the Facilitator agreed to contact Ysgol Treffynnon in Holywell with a view to holding the October meeting at that venue; if this was not the case, the meeting would be moved to an alternative date. This was agreed by the Committee.

Mrs. Rebecca Stark suggested that Sychdyn Primary School could be asked to host a meeting at the end of the year and that the Head Teacher could perhaps provide an informal report on how transferred pupils were settling in.

A similar suggestion was also made by Councillor Carolyn Thomas for a meeting to be held at Ysgol Parc y Llan at a later date.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be updated and noted; and
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

23. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 3.30 pm)

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Chairman