

EDUCATION AND YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 OCTOBER 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Ysgol Treffynnon, Pen Y Maes Road, Holywell, Flintshire CH8 7EN on Thursday, 13th October, 2016

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors: Paul Cunningham, Peter Curtis, Adele Davies-Cooke, Andy Dunbobbin, David Healey, Phil Lightfoot, Dave Mackie, Nigel Steele-Mortimer, and David Williams

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: David Hytch, Rebecca Stark and Bernard Stuart

APOLOGIES: Councillor Marion Bateman, Colin Legg, Nancy Matthews, Vicky Perfect, Carolyn Thomas and Janine Beggan

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

IN ATTENDANCE:

Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator, and Committee Officer

Prior to the start of the meeting Mr John Weir, Head Teacher Ysgol Treffynnon welcomed the Committee to the Holywell Learning Campus. He said the Campus, which comprised a secondary school for pupils 11-16 and a primary school for pupils aged 3-11, was an exciting and innovative approach to co-located education services in Flintshire. He commented on the positive impact of the environment for learning and working and the school's aspirations to be a place of outstanding teaching and learning.

The Chair thanked Mr. Weir for his welcome and hospitality and for providing the opportunity for the Committee to have a tour of the facilities provided by the Campus.

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Councillor Peter Curtis declared a declaration of interest in the following item as a School Governor of Holywell High School.

Councillor Andy Dunbobbin also declared a declaration of interest in the following item as a School Governor of Connah's Quay High School.

Item 4 – School Modernisation update

25. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8 September 2016 had been circulated to Members with the agenda.

Accuracy

Councillor Dave Mackie referred to page 4, first paragraph, and said that the reference to 'mandatory' should be amended to 'non-mandatory'. Councillor Mackie also referred to page 8, and said his surname had been omitted from the second paragraph in item 21.

Matters arising

Councillor Chris Bithell referred to page 5, second paragraph, and the concerns which had been raised around the timing of the recent decision issued by the Welsh Government (WG) concerning the closure of John Summers High School. He asked if the Chief Officer had received a response from the WG to the concerns which had been put forward. The Chief Officer said he had written to the WG to outline the challenges in supporting communities under these circumstances but had not received a response as yet.

RESOLVED:

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

26. SCHOOL MODERNISATION UPDATE

The Chief Officer introduced a report to give an update on the progress of the School Modernisation Programme. He provided background information and advised that the projects at both Holywell Learning Campus and Deeside 6th had been delivered on time and within budget. He paid tribute to the work of officers, primary and secondary school staff, school governors, and external contractors for their hard work and commitment to provide a state of the art learning environment for pupils. The Chief Officer commented on the excellent GCSE and A level results achieved at Ysgol Treffynnon and said that being co-located provided both schools the opportunity to work together on aspects of school improvement and sharing best practice which would have a positive impact on the transition of learners between the phases and would underpin even higher levels of achievement for the future.

The Chief Officer advised that the project at Deeside 6th had been operational for the start of the new 2016 academic year and referred to the number of pupils on roll as at September 2016 and the courses currently available. Referring to the Holywell Learning Campus he said that Phase 1 (buildings) was handed over August 2016. Pupils from Holywell High School, Ysgol y Fron Junior School and Ysgol Perth y Terfyn Infants school transferred to the new facility in September 2016. Phase 2 of the programme, to demolish the old high school building to create outdoor play and sporting facilities for Ysgol Treffynnon, would be completed in February 2017.

The Chief Officer referred to the key considerations as detailed in the report around statutory consultations and proposals and the transition arrangements/meetings with John Summers High School following the Ministerial decision announced in August 2016. He also referred to a report to be considered at the next meeting of Cabinet on 18 October 2016 on modernisation works at Connah's Quay High School in line with the Ministerial decision on the closure of John Summers High School. The Chief Officer advised that a report was also being submitted to the meeting of Cabinet for approval of the capital project to consolidate the current split site primary school buildings in Penyffordd onto one site in the village.

The Chief Officer reported that Cabinet had determined the statutory closure of Ysgol Maes Edwin and Ysgol Llanfynydd at its meeting on 19 April 2016. He explained that transition arrangements have been undertaken at both schools and pupils, parents, and staff are being supported through the process. Cabinet had also supported the commitment from the Governing Bodies of Ysgol Maes Garmon and Ysgol Mornant to develop and consult on a federation proposal. The federation would formally commence on 10 November 2016.

The Chair thanked the Chief Officer for the update and invited members to raise questions.

Councillor Dave Mackie referred to the proposed improvements to Connah's Quay High School and said his understanding was that funding provided under the school modernisation strategy could only be utilised for new building projects. The Chief Officer explained that the 21st Century Programme was focussed on new building and sustainable refurbishment.

Mr. David Hytch referred to paragraph 1.05 of the report and the number of students on roll and asked whether officers envisaged full enrolment in the future to justify the financial investment made. In his response the Chief Officer explained that the numbers on roll were positive and in line with expectations for the first annual cohort. Officers and school colleagues were confident that the number of students on roll would rise year on year.

Councillor Ian Roberts requested information on which schools 6th form pupils across Flintshire had previously attended. The Senior Manager, School Planning and Provision agreed to contact the schools in Flintshire to obtain this information prior to the next meeting. The Chair welcomed the opportunity to consider the further information and advised that the Committee would be able to continue to track A level results going forward.

Mr. David Hytch raised concerns around the Admission Policy and said he would like assurance that all young people had equal access to achieve higher grades at GCSE or A level. The Chief Officer agreed to provide a future report on the work being undertaken to improve the advice provided to young people wishing to study their A Levels.

In response to the further queries and concerns raised by Councillor Mackie around the number of students on roll at the Deeside 6th the Senior Manager, School Planning and Provision, agreed to provide a breakdown of the

information to identify where all sixth form students had previously undertaken their GCSE studies.

Referring to sixth form admission numbers, Mrs Rebecca Stark commented on the need to take into consideration a period of 'settling in' for students and suggested that data analysis be captured early next year to identify any changes.

The Chief Officer suggested that the Committee consider setting up a Task & Finish Group to review all aspects of information collected on 6th form pupils, in order to gain a clearer picture on progression pathways. Following discussion it was agreed that the following issues be considered by the Task & Finish Group:-

- Data on the number of 6th form pupils at the beginning of term and during the middle and end of term;
- Projected numbers for Deeside 6th at the start of the process;
- Overview of what all 16 years olds decide to do once they have completed their GCSE's.

The Chair suggested that the Committee be updated with information on the original projected student numbers and expectations for Deeside 6th. The Chief Officer said that this would could also be carried out by the Task and Finish Group. The Facilitator advised that a report seeking nominations for membership of the Task and Finish Group would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

Councillor David Williams expressed some initial concerns around the site identified for the new Penyffordd school.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the progress of the School Modernisation Programme be noted; and
- (b) That a report to enable the Committee to consider setting up a 6th Form Education Task & Finish Group be presented to the next meeting.

27. SCHOOL RESERVES AS AT MARCH 2016

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced the report to provide an analysis of the financial reserves held by schools in Flintshire as at 31 March 2016. He said an analysis of reserves for each school at the end of March 2016 was appended to the report. The Chief Officer explained that whilst positive balances in primary schools had been generally maintained the secondary sector was struggling to balance its budgets. This was a similar pattern reported across Wales and the national statistics on school reserves were due to be published on 20 October 2016.

The Chief Officer invited the Finance Manager to provide an update on the Authority's treatment of surplus balances. The Finance Manager explained that the Scheme for Financing Schools had been reviewed recently and it was agreed

that it would be revised to place more onus on governing bodies to justify holding a balance which exceeded 5% of a school's delegated budget and was over the £50K/£100K threshold. Where there was no justification for holding a balance, or the balance has not been planned but has arisen incidentally, steps would be taken to claw back the funding. Commenting on the positive balances maintained by primary schools the Finance Manager reported that there had been a late allocation of funding in relation to Single Status at the end of the last financial year which had meant that some schools had a higher than anticipated balance. However, 8 out of 12 secondary schools in Flintshire were forecasting a deficit position by the end of the current financial year. The Finance Manager agreed to provide the Committee with a copy of the Welsh Government report on school reserves following publication in October 2016.

Mrs. Rebecca Stark asked whether there had been any response from the Welsh Government (WG) to the Authority's lobbying on the financial settlement. The Chief Officer responded that representations and letters had been made to the WG and he suggested that an update be provided to the next meeting of the Committee following submission of the draft financial settlement to County Council on 19 October 2016. The Chief Officer commented that the impact of continuing austerity measures on the financial resilience of schools was an area of concern. However, the issue of additional funding was undermined unless schools provided a robust statement as to the use the governing body proposed to make of a surplus in the school balance which exceeded 5% of the school budget.

During discussion the Finance Manager responded to the further queries raised by Members around deficit balances. She advised that Governors had no legal right to set a deficit budget without the consent of the Authority, however, schools forecasting a significant deficit position would be required to apply for a licensed deficit. She reported on the expertise and support provided by the Schools Accounting Team to schools where the financial position was cause for concern.

RESOLVED

That the school balances as at 31 March 2016, be noted.

28. QUARTER 1 IMPROVEMENT PLAN MONITORING REPORT 2016/17

The Chief Officer introduced a report to present the monitoring of progress for the first quarter of the Improvement Plan 2016/17 priority 'Skills and Learning' relevant to the Committee.

The Chair invited Members to raise questions.

Councillor Dave Mackie commented that there were a number of typographical errors in the Improvement Plan Monitoring report which was appended. The Chief Officer explained how the data was compiled and agreed to feedback the comments made by Councillor Mackie to ensure that report authors checked their reports prior to submission in future.

Mr. David Hytch referred to page 55 of the progress report and referring to the statement 'Leadership capacity does not match school needs' asked if this was a statement of risk or fact. The Senior Manager School Improvement explained that it was a statement of risk. Mr. Hytch referred to page 42, paragraph 1.10, of the report and asked what were the 'innovative ways' referred to in the first paragraph. The Chief Officer explained that pre school groups and early years were two examples.

Mr. Hytch drew attention to page 5 of the report, paragraph 1.2.6, and raised concerns that the only way to reduce the repairs and maintenance of school buildings backlog was through the school modernisation programme. The Senior Manager School Planning and Provision, commented on the improved position regarding the repairs and maintenance backlog of school buildings and said there would continue to be a reduction going forward. The Chief Officer commented on the need to also maintain the quality and standards of new school buildings.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

29. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the report to consider the Forward Work Programme for the Committee. She drew attention to the venue for the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 17 November 2016 which was at the 6th Forum Hub, Coleg Cambria, and said a tour of the facility would commence at 1.00 pm.

Following a suggestion from the Chair, the Committee agreed that the meeting scheduled for 22 December 2016 be cancelled and that the item on Quarter 2 Improvement Plan Monitoring Report which was scheduled for consideration be moved to the meeting to be held on 15 December 2016.

The Facilitator reported on the following additional reports which were to be added to the Forward Work Programme for the next meeting scheduled for 17th November 2016:

- Nercwys Primary School Review
- Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and Welsh as a Second Language

Councillor David Healey suggested that Ysgol Castell Alun be added as a possible venue for a future meeting. Councillor Healey also asked if a report on the strategies used to engage with young people around Anti-Social Behaviour and substance misuse within the communities could be submitted to a future meeting. The Chief Officer explained that the strategies were outlined within the Youth Services Plan and suggested that a workshop on the Integrated Youth Strategy be organised for Members.

Councillor Healey asked if a report on the impact to teachers on curriculum changes imposed by Welsh Government could be presented to a future meeting. The Chief Officer said that the publication of the Education Plan from Welsh

Government was awaited. It was agreed that the Facilitator would liaise with the Chief Officer on this issue following the meeting.

RESOLVED:

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

30. 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 1.30 pm and ended at 4.35 pm)

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Chairman