

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

**27 JUNE 2019**

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, 27th June, 2019

### **PRESENT: David Hytch (Vice-Chair in the Chair)**

Councillors: Janet Axworthy, Geoff Collett, Bob Connah, Andy Dunbobbin, Kevin Hughes, Tudor Jones, David Mackie, and Martin White

**CO-OPTED MEMBERS:** Shaun Hingston

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors: Paul Cunningham and Ian Smith.

**SUBSTITUTION:** Councillors Paul Johnson for Councillor David Healey and Sean Bibby for Councillor Gladys Healey

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Carolyn Thomas. Democratic Services Manager

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Councillor Ian Roberts, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education; Chief Officer (Education & Youth); and Senior Manager, School Improvement. (For minute no.14) Mr. Arwyn Thomas, GwE Managing Director and Mr Marc Berw Hughes

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officer

Prior to the start of the meeting, the Chairman welcomed Shaun Hingston to the meeting, who had recently been appointed as a Co-opted member of the Committee representing the Youth Council. Shaun Hingston made a statement to the Committee thanking Members for the opportunity to sit on the Committee. A copy of his statement is attached at Appendix 1 of the minutes.

### **11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **12. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 20 May 2019 were submitted.

### **RESOLVED:**

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

### **13. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING**

The Facilitator presented the Forward Work Programme which had been updated following the last meeting and was attached as Appendix 1 for Members' consideration. She reminded Members that the next meeting of the Committee,

to be held on 25 July 2019, would be a joint meeting with the Social & Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The Facilitator referred to the actions arising from the previous meeting of the Committee and reported on the outcomes as detailed in appendix 2 of the report. She advised that information had also been included on the Cabinet decision regarding consideration of the Discretionary Transport Policy Review – Outcome of Consultation report at its meeting on 18 June, and consideration of the Notice of Motion, submitted by Councillor David Healey to the meeting of the County Council on 18 June, 2019.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme as amended, be approved;
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises; and
- (c) That the progress made in completing the outstanding actions be noted.

**14. REGIONAL SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPROVEMENT SERVICE (GWE)**

The Chair welcomed Mr. Arwyn Thomas, GwE Managing Director, and Mr. Marc Berw Hughes, to the meeting.

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report to receive an update on progress with the development of the regional school effectiveness and improvement service and how the new model was being received and embedded. She provided background information and advised that the GwE Annual Report for 2018-19 provided a detailed overview for members of the work of the Regional School Improvement Service over the last year across the North Wales region. It covered a range of areas including standards, provision, the contribution of the service to the national transformation agenda, partnership working, and business matters. The appendices to the report provided some specific information related to learner outcomes and standards of education in Flintshire. They also provided an analysis of responses from Flintshire school leaders on their views of the effectiveness of the Regional School Improvement Service which were recently collected through a questionnaire. The main areas for development, identified from the self-evaluation processes undertaken within GwE, are priorities in the Business Plan for 2019-2020.

The Chief Officer advised that the Annual Report should also be read in conjunction with the Authority's own self-evaluation report which was presented to members at the last meeting of the Committee. She explained that officers from GwE had worked very closely with the Local Authority on the development of that report which provided a comprehensive view of the quality of education services in Flintshire and demonstrated the effective partnership working being undertaken to support all the Authority's schools on their improvement journey to secure the best outcomes for Flintshire learners.

The Chief Officer referred to the recent Estyn Inspection of the local authority education services and said that the outcome of the Inspection would be publicised on 9 August 2019. She expressed her thanks for the significant contribution made by GwE to the Inspection process and commented on the close working relationship between officers from GwE and the Authority. The Chief Officer invited Arwyn Thomas to present the GwE Annual Report 2018-19.

Mr. Thomas advised that, as stated in the GwE Inter Authority Agreement, GwE would report annually on the performance of the Service in delivering the Service functions and key aims. He reported that the GwE annual report provided an overview of the following areas: background and context, standards, provision, the reform journey, partnership working, business, and business plan priorities for 2019-20. Also included in the report were several appendices which referred specifically to the support work that had been undertaken in Flintshire schools.

The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education commented on the work between the Authority and GwE to improve schools if assistance was needed and address relationship and model management. He also commented on the close work undertaken with Cabinet members across North Wales and Chief Officers following the concerns raised around the GCSE English exam results. Councillor Roberts thanked Mr. Thomas for his detailed presentation.

Shaun Hingston referred to Appendix 2 of the report, which he said described the changes that schools were statutorily obliged to make as being 'turbulent' and 'pushing schools to their limits.' However, the GwE Annual Report recognised the tough times that schools, the Local Authority and Welsh Government were facing financially, in terms of devolved spending. He asked what measures would GwE put into place, over the delivery of these new changes, that would aid schools in supporting staff and students, especially in a financial sense so that they could reach the highest level of their potentials. Mr. Arwyn Thomas responded to outline where GwE had assisted in managing resources as best they could and to ensure that their budgets had been reduced to ensure continued financial assistance to schools. He outlined shared learning between GwE and schools across North Wales in order to continue to provide support at a teacher level.

In response to a question from Councillor Tudor Jones, Mr. Arwyn Thomas explained that GwE had evolved from 'challenging' to 'supporting' schools in their improvement and innovation going forward. The Senior Manager, School Improvement, outlined how support was targeted where needed.

Councillor Kevin Hughes paid tribute to Headteachers and all staff in schools across Flintshire for continued improvement and positive results despite continued financial pressures. He commented on the performance data which showed that girls continued to perform better than boys and raised concerns around the low number of pupils choosing science courses at a higher level and asked how this was being addressed. He also commented on the importance of arts and music in schools. The Chief Officer agreed on the importance of arts and music, which she said continued to be a highly valued provision across Flintshire schools. The Senior Manager, School Improvement, advised that there was an increase from last year in the number of students choosing sciences. The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education commented on

how the curriculum had become very narrow at the end of Key Stage 2 and said that the new Curriculum, which would be rolled out in September 2022, would assist in addressing this.

Councillor Dave Mackie commented on the appendices of the report and said that further detail around specific learning requirements was needed to ensure that Member could fully understand the information provided. Mr. Arwyn Thomas accepted that greater narrative could be provided in future reports to assist with understanding the data shown in the reports.

Councillor Mackie referred to the performance figures for schools across Flintshire. Councillor Mackie commented that the GCSE level 2+ was considered to be the gold standard achievement but StatsWales shows that between 2013, when GwE took over, and 2018 the percentage of pupils achieving that standard in every county in North Wales had dropped. Only three other counties have dropped, 13 have improved. North Wales counties have dropped 37 positions during that time. At their meeting in November 2018 the GwE Joint Committee stated: "The Secondary Schools Improvement Strategy (September 2017) sets out the direction for regional developments over the next three years". Councillor Mackie asked if the Committee could see that strategy and hoped it identified changes, included targets, and showed progress.

In response, the Chief Officer reported that over the last three years performance had steadily improved through collaborative working with GwE. The level 3 business plan was for every individual school to ensure they had the support they need. She said that she was confident that every school in Flintshire had a bespoke plan that was designed to meet their need and continue to improve performance. Schools and officers were not complacent and are moving in the right direction to get back to the previous benchmark performance position.

In response to comments from Councillor Mackie on the GwE Business Plans, Mr. Arwyn Thomas advised that the report was presented to the GwE Joint Committee in November 2015 and that as a region it was recognised that GwE continued to be on a journey of improvement. Councillor Mackie asked that a copy of this report be made available to Members in order to assess what actions were being put in place to deal with the concerns raised.

Councillor Paul Johnson asked how GwE assisted in developing and enhancing cultural changes in schools. Mr. Arwyn Thomas referred to the positive response, shown within the report that had been given from schools when asked about how they viewed the relationship between GwE, the local authority and schools. He said that cultural changes needed to be a 'top down' approach and that a cultural change to be addressed going forward was to continue to encourage schools to work together to share best practice. The Chief Officer advised that the standard of well-being in schools cross Flintshire was excellent, and said that this did not happen unless there was a healthy culture in schools. The Estyn report which was due to be published would give a collective overview of the culture within Flintshire as a local authority and the relationship between individual schools.

Councillors Mackie and Janet Axworthy asked if a copy of the GwE Key Stage 4 Improvement Strategy could be circulated to the Committee following the

meeting. Councillor Axworthy also asked if a report on the work of the Music Service could be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

Shaun Hingston asked how GwE consult with young people on issues of strategy or review and asked if consideration could be given to extending the membership of the GwE Joint Committee to include a young person representative. Mr. Arwyn Thomas said that he was happy to put this suggestion forward at the next meeting of the Management Board. The Chief Officer commented on the increased amount of engagement between the local authority and young people and said that she was happy to discuss this suggestion with GwE colleagues.

The Chairman said that there had been considerable progress made in the performance of Welsh language at primary level but raised concerns around the difficulties in recruiting trained linguists to teach Welsh as a second language as well as staff at all levels able to teach through the medium of Welsh. He commented on the current financial climate and the need to continue to improve with diminishing resources. He also commented on the pressure being placed on Headteachers and the duty of care to employees placed on school governors in order to ensure the management of their wellbeing and work life balance.

The Chief Officer said that she was also concerned around how the progress being made in Welsh language at a primary level was not being followed through in secondary schools and said that there needed to be a change in culture in secondary schools to promote and support Welsh language. She recognised that there were concerns around Welsh Government setting significant targets but not putting the appropriate infrastructure in place to assist with these changes.

In response to the comments on the wellbeing of Headteachers, the Chief Officer reported that officers work closely with colleagues to ensure support is provided to Headteachers. She said that officers were working to support each other and that the quality of communication with schools had been positive particularly in keeping everyone up to date on budget proposals. Headteachers are actively invited to talk about the issues they are facing and accept the support provided. The feedback received is that the local authority is very supportive of Headteachers.

The Committee supported the suggestion made by the Chief Officer that a workshop for Members be arranged for a suitable date in the Autumn Term to discuss in detail performance measures, comparative analysis data, and standards of school facilities in Flintshire.

The Chairman thanked Arwyn Thomas, and Marc Berw Hughes for their attendance, presentation and detailed responses to Members' questions.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Annual Report from GwE be accepted; and
- (b) That the positive impact of the regional service on the standards of education being achieved in Flintshire schools be noted.

15. **MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE**

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

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.50 pm)

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**Chairman**

## APPENDIX 1

Mr Chairman, Leader Roberts, Members of the Committee,

I stand before you here today, deeply honoured to be the youngest person appointed to an Overview and Scrutiny Committee in Flintshire's history. I stand here today, in the heart of our local democracy, with boundless gratitude for the confidence placed in me by the young people of the Flintshire Youth Council who elected me as their representative, and the Officers, Elected Members, Committee Members and Facilitators who have supported me, encouraged me, advised me and made this distant possibility a very unique reality. I wish to extend my appreciation to Ali Thomas and Kate Glover-Jones who were integral in ensuring that I'm able to stand here, and represent the tens-of-thousands of young people who live, work, go to school or receive services in Flintshire.

I'd like to thank both the Cabinet Member, Cllr Ian Roberts, and the Committee's Chair, Cllr Dave Healey, for preparing me, and my Deputy Tommy Comber, for the proceedings of this Committee. I'd also like to mention the very positive introduction that I had with the Deputy Chair, Mr Hytch, before this meeting began. I greatly look forward to supporting you and working with you, as you wisely steer the Committee towards the successful work that we, together, will be able to achieve.

Mr Chairman,

By completing my appointment as the Youth Council's Representative with such alacrity, this Committee has opened an unprecedented opportunity. For the first time in our Local Government's history, a young person has been given the opportunity to speak on behalf of those who so often go forgotten, and unheard. We, together, have set a precedent so that, when I vacate this seat, a young person, with new ambitions, new hopes, and different experiences will be able to make an impact on this Committee's work and build a future focused on young people. As I too intend to do. After-all, this Committee is focused on the crucial services that Flintshire County Council offer in relation to young people, their safety, development and wellbeing.

The surge in demand for youth-led representation attests not only to FCC's abiding relevance in being a catalyst for youth-focused policy, but also to its central place in advancing the opportunities of young people to develop as citizens and embody the principles laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child.

The road that we must pave toward a community of intergenerational, diverse and distinct local representation for all has many hurdles. As a Member of this Committee, I will make the most of the authority invested in this body, the public voice in which I now yield and the mandate given to me by the representatives of young people. I will work diligently to materialise our responsibility to protect the most vulnerable young people in communities across our County and for the continued improvement and protection of local services, upon which many young people rely. I will continue to build upon the fantastic work that this Committee has already managed to achieve.

I will do all I can to serve the young people of Flintshire, in this great honour and role. Thank you.