

EDUCATION AND YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
22 NOVEMBER 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 Friday, 22nd November, 2019

PRESENT: Councillor David Healey (Chairman)

Councillors: Janet Axworthy, Sian Braun, Bob Connah, Andy Dunbobbin, Kevin Hughes, Tudor Jones, Dave Mackie, and Martin White

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: David Hytch and Lynn Bartlett

SUBSTITUTES: Councillor: Patrick Heesom (for David Williams)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Geoff Collett, Paul Cunningham, Gladys Healey and Ian Smith.

CONTRIBUTORS: Chief Officer (Education & Youth) and Education Finance Manager, Strategic Finance Manager and Accountant for minute number 31.

IN ATTENDANCE: Education & Youth Facilitator and Democratic Services Support Officer

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

34. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY: COUNCIL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2020/21

The Strategic Finance Manager presented a report on proposed budget efficiencies and cost pressures for Education & Youth pending the completion of ongoing work on corporate finance options and resolution of the Welsh Government (WG) budget. WG had recently confirmed that they would publish the draft Welsh budget on 16 December with the Provisional Settlement being published on the same day. Completion of the budget setting process would be a role for Council at its meeting in January-March.

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) outlined the proposed Portfolio Business Plan Efficiencies, as detailed in the report and explained that budgets had been reduced as much as safely possible in order to protect school delegated budgets.

Councillor Patrick Heesom raised concerns around any increase in the working assumption on Council Tax and felt that it would be unacceptable to raise Council Tax above 5%. He suggested that further efficiency options be explored and that Members be provided with portfolio expenditure plans in order to better analyse and understand portfolio budgets. He also asked for further information on the pressures caused by deficit school balances.

The Strategic Finance Manager explained that no additional portfolio efficiencies would be sought and there had been no new requests from Members to look at new areas of efficiencies. The Education Finance Manager explained that a significant budget pressure on school was the introduction of the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Bill as this required additional resources for schools to support pupils with ALN. She also outlined the pressure on school budgets following the Teacher's Pay Award which would not be fully funded.

In response to questions from Mr. David Hytch, the Chief Officer explained that the efficiencies identified within the Integrated Youth Provision Service did not mean the loss of an officer post and that the additional funding identified for the Youth Justice Team would assist in the strengthening of the management structure with the appointment of a Senior Manager post.

In response to a question from Councillor Tudor Jones around the actuarial review of the Clwyd Pension Fund, the Strategic Finance Manager explained that the review was nearing completion. It was anticipated that there would be a reduction in the amount paid by the Council of around £2m.

Councillor Andy Dunbobbin referred to the challenges being faced by secondary schools who currently held deficit budgets and asked if schools were being challenged and supported in exploring if further efficiencies could be found. He also commented on the 'Mockingbird' programme which he said was a good example of strengthening provision in a financially efficient way. The Chief Officer confirmed that schools were challenged and supported and that regular meetings for schools experiencing financial difficulties were held. She outlined the Licensed Deficit Agreement for schools with deficit budgets and reported that a review of this Agreement had recently been undertaken with a revised version recently being circulated to schools. It was agreed that a copy of the revised Agreement be circulated to the Committee following the meeting.

Councillor Tudor Jones referred to the financial pressures from ALN exclusions and asked who was responsible for the cost of education for an excluded child. He also asked if the reasons for the increase in exclusions for children with ALN were being understood. The Finance Manager outlined the funding formula attributed with excluded pupils, explaining that if a child attended a different school following exclusion, the funding would follow that child.

The Chief Officer explained that the reasons for the rise in exclusions for children with ALN was difficult to determine. Children may have witnessed domestic abuse or violence, having to deal with separation and divorce of parents, all of which were acknowledged to impact on young people. There had been an increase due to drug use with schools adhering to the Substance Mis-Use Policy and also an increase of violent behaviour and verbal and physical problems in schools together with carrying weapons. These were complex issues with Head Teachers wanting to protect the other pupils and staff with parents concerned about safety whilst recognising that the young person also needed support too. It was not easy to support schools and for that young person to avoid exclusion but sometimes the wider impact on the school had to be considered.

Councillor Dave Mackie thanked the officers for the information contained within the report.

The recommendation within the report were moved by Councillor Heesom and seconded by Councillor Dunbobbin.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee endorsed the Education and Youth efficiency proposals for 2020/21; and
- (b) That the Committee endorsed Education and Youth cost pressures recommended for inclusion in the budget for 2020/21.

35. COUNCIL PLAN 2019/20 – MID YEAR MONITORING

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) presented a summary of progress on performance within the Council Plan at the mid-year point of 2019/20, relevant to the Education & Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The report was an exception-based report and concentrated on areas of under-performance, with the Chief Officer providing a detailed update on the following areas:-

- Access to sanitary products in schools; and
- Limited funding to address the backlog of known repair and maintenance works in Education & Youth Assets

Welsh Government (WG) had announced additional funding to provide re-usable sanitary products, and therefore a change was needed during the procurement process. This had been addressed and it was anticipated that the target would be met by the end of the year. The Committee were aware from previous discussions of the risks associated with the reduction on funding to schools and the impact this had on the repairs and maintenance budget. Representation were being made by the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education and the Senior Manager, School Planning & Provision for additional funding to be provided to Local Authorities to address repairs and maintenance in school buildings.

Councillor Heesom questioned why sections of the Ambitious Council theme of the Council Plan was being reported to this Committee. In response, the Chief Officer advised that during the review of the Council Plan for 2019/20 it was felt that the 21st Century Schools Programme should sit within the Ambitious Council theme and therefore would continue to be reported to this committee. The creation of a single joint Archives Service between Flintshire and Denbighshire County Council, as presented to the Committee at its last meeting, also sat within the Ambitious Council theme.

Councillor Dave Mackie referred to the action for teaching staff receiving quality professional development through the self-evaluation system which was showing a 'yellow' RAG status and asked why this status was 'yellow' and whether a progress update could be provided. In response the Chief Officer reminded the Committee of the introduction of the new National Curriculum for Wales which would be implemented by 2022 and explained that the action to

support teaching staff remained a risk to ensure the standards at schools were protected. GwE had been provided the majority of the training and all Flintshire schools had responded positively and were progressing well with training through shared working. It was suggested that an update report be provided to the Committee towards the end of the summer term to highlight what work had been undertaken.

Councillor Mackie also suggested the following changes the actions and risks shown within the appendices of the report:-

- 3.1.4.1 (CP) Policy change agreed by quarter one and implementation of a revised and sustainable policy – action title needs to be clearer;
- 1.5.6.4 (CP) Measured performance using new and meaningful performance measure – action and comment needs to be clearer; and
- ST214 Failure to obtain grant funding – risk title needs to be clearer.

It was agreed that the Facilitator provide this feedback to the Performance Team following the meeting.

In response to a suggestion from Councillor Mackie, it was agreed that a letter of congratulation be sent to Gail Bennett, Early Intervention Service Manager, on the work being undertaken to exceed the target set for the number of children who accessed the Childcare offer.

Councillor Kevin Hughes referred to the access to sanitary products and said that following a conversation with the Learning Advisor, Health, Wellbeing and Safeguarding, he was confident that the target would be met by the end of the year. The Chief Officer advised that all secondary schools had received products which were available to young people. Local food banks and youth clubs would also soon be receiving products which would be available to young people to access.

The recommendation within the report, together with the following additional recommendation was proposed by Councillor Kevin Hughes and seconded by Mr, David Hytch:-

- That the Committee support the on-going work being taken to request additional funds from Welsh Government (WG) to address the repairs and maintenance backlog.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee support the on-going work being taken to request additional funds from Welsh Government (WG) to address the repairs and maintenance backlog.

36. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 11.00 am and ended at 12.04 pm)

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Chairman