

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28 JANUARY 2021

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Education, Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Thursday 28th January 2021.

PRESENT: Councillor David Healey (Chair)

Councillors: Janet Axworthy, Sian Braun, Bob Connah, Paul Cunningham, Gladys Healey, Joe Johnson, Tudor Jones, Dave Mackie, Ian Smith and Martin White

CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Lynn Bartlett, David Hytch and Wendy White

APOLOGIES: Mrs Rebecca Stark and Senior Manager School Improvements Systems

SUBSTITUTIONS: Councillor Patrick Heesom (for Councillor David Williams)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Veronica Gay and Carolyn Thomas attended as observers

CONTRIBUTORS:

Councillor Ian Roberts, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education; Chief Officer (Education & Youth); Mr David Edwards, Mr Martin Froggett, Gaynor Murphy and Vicky Lees (GWE) (for agenda item 5), Damian Hughes, Senior Manager, School Planning and Provision (for agenda item 6), Anthony Smith, Corporate Health and Safety Advisor (for agenda item 7) and Jay Davies, Strategic Performance Advisor (for agenda item 8)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator, Democratic Services Officer and Democratic Services Support Officer

30. COUNCILLOR KEVIN HUGHES

The Chairman led the Committee in a silent tribute to Councillor Kevin Hughes who had sadly passed away.

Councillor Tudor Jones spoke of his friendship with Councillor Kevin Hughes and his many achievements in a short time as a County Councillor, particularly his campaign around free sanitary products being made available in schools. He commented on his last message imploring people across Flintshire to remain safe which he said had been very powerful and said that he would miss him greatly.

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) spoke on behalf of all officers within the Education portfolio and commented on their sadness at hearing that Councillor the whole portfolio who were so desperately sorry to hear the sad news about Kevin and Kevin Hughes ad passed away. She said that he had

been hugely influential on the Committee and praised his energy, enthusiasm and creativity. She said that it had been a pleasure working with him over the years and that he would be sorely missed by all officers who had been grateful for his support.

Mr. David Hytch said that Councillor Kevin Hughes had been a great asset to the Committee and commented on his proactive contributions and how he was always unfailingly positive. He said that he would be a great loss to the County Council, the community in which he representation but most of all to his family.

The Chair spoke in support of all the previous comments and said that Councillor Kevin Hughes has been a tremendous Member of the Committee. He recalled the Committee considering the implications of social media on school children and how Councillor Hughes has arranged a site visit for himself and the Chief Officer to enable engagement with school children. Councillor Hughes had then prepared a press article to highlight the importance of keeping children safe on social media but did not reference his involvement which showed his unselfish nature and his desire to protect children.

31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

The Chairman, Councillor Gladys Healey and Councillor Tudor Jones declared a personal interest in agenda item 6 – School Modernisation Update.

32. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2020 were received.

Councillor Bob Connah proposed that the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. The proposal was seconded by Joe Johnson.

RESOLVED:

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

33. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the draft Forward Work Programme and advised that formal feedback from Estyn on Blended Learning would be included as part of the self-evaluation of Education Services report to be presented at the next meeting. She drew Members attention to the reports to be presented to the joint Education Youth & Culture and Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny meeting on the 17 June and advised that a report on Intensive Assessment and Therapeutic Support, as suggested by Councillor Mackie, had been added.

On action tracking, the majority of the actions had been completed, with information from IT on funding from Welsh Government (WG) for digital learning still to be provided to the Committee.

Mr David Hytch thanked the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) for the information circulated on Adult Community Learning but clarified that his specific question during the last meeting had been around how potential clients would be identified. The Chief Officer advised that due to the increase in funding and partnership working with Wrexham Council and the Deeside Community Trust, courses would be advertised more widely with an extensive range of programmes being made available to all people above the age of 19. Courses would be advertised for learners to apply to but also community partners could signpost or refer in – such as Coleg Cambria and Communities for Work, who were represented on the partnership.

The recommendations outlined within the report were proposed by Councillor Paul Cunningham and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be noted;
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair 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.

34. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND EXAMINATION 2021 UPDATE

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) introduced the School Improvement and Examination 2021 Update report and welcomed the following GwE officers to the meeting, who would assist in presenting the report:-

- Mr. Martyn Froggett, Secondary Core Lead for Flintshire
- Mr. David Edwards, Primary Core Lead for Flintshire
- Mrs. Gaynor Murphy, Secondary Improvement Advisor
- Mrs. Vicky Lees, Primary Improvement Advisor

The Chief Officer commented on the Blended Learning report presented to the Committee at its meeting in December and explained that this report gave a broader overview of the support the regional service had provided to all local authorities during the emergency situation. The focus had been on the well-being of learners, school communities and staff which had helped to shape and maintain the focus on school improvement in all schools whilst providing support during the pandemic.

The Chief Officer provided an overview of the support provided for core skills of literacy and numeracy and the professional development plan delivered by GwE for teachers and classroom assistants to ensure quality learning whether in the classroom or via digital remote learning.

The detailed presentation on Accelerating Learning Programme was provided which covered the following areas:-

- Context – Literacy and numeracy, delivering and maintaining high quality teaching across the curriculum with high quality, structured and targeted interventions;

- Accelerating the learning;
- Primary – examples of learning sequences, evidence reviews and teaching and learning strategies;
- Accelerating the learning within the Secondary Sector;
- Literacy Toolkit;
- Literacy Targeted Offer;
- GCSE English Language – Inference, Accelerate;
- Mathemateg GwE;
- Impact

In response to a comment from Councillor Ian Smith, it was agreed that a larger print copy of the accelerated skills model, shown as part of the presentation, be circulated to the Committee following the meeting.

Mr David Hytch thanked officers for the report and presentation which he felt had been informative and commented on the positive co-ordination and collaboration between the local authority, schools and GwE. He commented on the responses to individual surveys, as shown within the appendix to the report and questioned whether this related to Wales as a whole rather than just Flintshire and suggested that it should be highlighted within the report that the wellbeing of pupils and staff was of the highest priority. He also commented on the immense strain schools were feeling in getting the balance right between school improvement and prioritising staff and learner wellbeing, as stated within the report, and whilst he welcomed advisors looking to verify the quality of learning, in the circumstances he hoped that the pressure schools were under would be taken into account. The Chief Officer responded that it was not their intention to put extra pressure on schools but the local authority had responsibility standards in schools and engaged regularly with Estyn. She reassured Members that additional pressure was not being put on schools, it was a case of monitoring the situation and adjusting support accordingly.

Mr. Froggett explained that it was not possible to undertake the usual standard of quality assurance and confirmed that focus was around supporting schools during a difficult time with the priority being on wellbeing. Discussions had been held with Head Teachers and the role of GwE was to mitigate their concerns and support them through the emergency. Mr. Edwards supported the comments and gave examples of live sessions provided at the requests of schools.

In response to a question from Mrs Bartlett, the Chief Officer outlined the importance of providing support for parents and advised that GwE had been proactive around this issue when advising schools of what an effective blended learning offer should be. A document had been provided to schools which provided guidance on communicating with parents to provide reassurance. Mrs. Gaynor Murphy advised of videos provided to schools to share with parents to assist them in supporting their children with basic literacy. Mrs. Bartlett thanked officers for their response and commented on her own personal experience and the positive way in which schools had adapted during the emergency situation, but raised concerns around the wellbeing of teachers and parents.

Councillor Dave Mackie commented on literacy and numeracy support and asked if this was additional to existing support. He also commented on

accelerated learning and asked if this meant tasks being completed in less time and was it improving the availability of materials. Mrs. Lees responded that the Accelerated Learning Programme provided schools with tools to measure where the pupils were with their online learning to assist when they returned to face to face learning in schools. The Programme strengthened literacy and numeracy skills and provided support to help pupils progress.

The Chairman thanked GwE for the way in which it had responded to the emergency situation and for the packages of support provided to schools and parents which were underpinned by the wellbeing of students. He commented on the challenge for GwE in liaising with schools to create grades for GCSE and A Levels and asked if the national reading and numeracy tests would still need to be taken. The Chief Officer responded that there were significant challenges ahead which was why joint working in schools was key to identify the sources of evidence upon which to base those judgements and this would be shared with pupils and parents. This information would be very transparent with learners aware of the date when the final assessments had to be submitted. Qualification Wales were working to provide guidance on this. It was a significant challenge for schools and GwE would be providing structured support but it would be schools making these decisions not GwE. Mrs. Lees confirmed that the Welsh Government National Personalised Assessments for reading and numeracy were still live and schools were able to access each child's account but there was no requirement for schools to carry out these tests during the current situation. The Chief Officer confirmed that this guidance had been circulated via the Head Teachers' Federation and Mr. Edwards also confirmed all schools were informed that they could use these tests for diagnostic purposes, as appropriate.

Councillor Mackie commented on the various training options available to teachers through GwE and suggested that information on how many teachers had taken part in the training sessions, their feedback on the training sessions and how many training sessions had taken place, could be included in future reports. He also commented on pupils who were not engaging and asked what additional support was being provided to assist pupils to re-engage and how what support would be provided to enable these pupils not to fall too far behind when they returned to face to face learning in schools. The Chief Officer referred to the Professional Learning Offer which had been provided as part of the report, which enabled the Committee to view the range and depth of professional learning courses being offered to schools. Mr. Froggett reported on the many training opportunities available and the National Programmes, such as, MPQH and middle leadership which had restarted recently with strong subscriptions from Flintshire. The Chief Officer said that schools would engage with whatever aspect of support they felt they needed and explained that the virtual offer also made the training more accessible and it was for schools in discussions with the Supporting Improvement Advisors to engage with any programmes they felt they required.

The Leader of the Council commented on the range of techniques being used by teachers to engage with young people during the emergency situation and said that structured play activities would be required to allow pupils to develop both academically and socially. He expressed caution around the expectations being imposed on young people, especially younger children who would need to adjust to the structure of school once again and that all young

people needed to be assessed to ascertain their needs. He had written to the Minister for Education as WLGA Spokesperson for Education requesting additional resources to meet the cost of additional support which would be required.

Mrs. Wendy White commended the packages of training provided in Flintshire and provided information on the training and development of leaders that was being provided in Catholic Schools and that this was available to any teacher or associate member of staff. This programme sat across the North West diocese and was available online with the focus on developing people coming into North Wales especially with regard to talent management to highlight what Wales had to offer in their fantastic schools. This was working in harmony with Flintshire.

Mrs Bartlett spoke in support of the comments made by the Leader of the Council and said that she was very pleased that the focus in Wales had been on well-being and to not allow these children to think they had failed. She felt that pupils should be congratulated for how they had developed new ways to entertaining themselves, supported their families, developed new interests and progressed their IT skills during this pandemic.

The recommendations outlined within the report, including the additional wording that the Committee applauds the range of support delivered by GwE, as suggested the Chairman, were proposed by Councillor Paul Cunningham and seconded by Mrs Lynne Bartlett.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee confirmed it had been able to effectively scrutinise the work of GwE in their delivery of school improvement services to Flintshire schools during the Covid-19 pandemic;
- (b) That the Committee acknowledged and applauded the extensive range of support delivered by GwE to enable schools to quickly and effectively change their models of educational provision in direct response to the Covid-19 pandemic; and
- (c) That the Committee acknowledged the effective partnership working between GwE and the Education Portfolio to ensure that Flintshire schools received high quality and timely support in an unprecedented period of change and anxiety.

35. SCHOOL MODERNISATION UPDATE

The Senior Manager (School Planning and Provision) presented the report which outlined progress of the School Modernisation Programme across a wide number of projects. Despite significant challenges due to the emergency situation, the School Modernisation Team had made significant progress in the Programme and had maintained and delivered in anticipated timelines by adapting working methods.

Updates on specific projects within the Programme were provided by the Senior Manager, as outlined within the report.

Councillor Tudor Jones commented on the proposal to establish a federation between Ysgol yr Esgob VA and Lixwm VA primary school and said that the co-operation between both schools and been very positive. He also commented on the childcare offer at both schools and thanked the Senior Manager for his support in ensuring this was included as part of the project.

Councillor Dave Mackie asked if additional projects would be considered following completion of Band A and B of the Programme and also if an update on the High School in Saltney could be provided. He also asked if clarification on MIM funding could be provided to the Committee. The Senior Manager explained that MIM was a new model of the Private Public Partnership (PPP) and that WEPCo was a subsidiary of the Welsh Bank of Wales and was also in partnership with Welsh Government (WG). The overarching percentage intervention rate the authority gleaned from this was 81%. He confirmed that this was a better model than traditional model where schools were built with a lot of money and then there were insufficient funds to maintain the buildings. This model provided a 25 year life cycle for the building so when the building was handed back to the local authority it was in excellent condition with no maintenance issues. He also advised that the Band C Programme was due to commence in 2025 with planning work having already commenced.

The Chief Officer reported that work was progressing on preparing for consulting on proposals for the High School in Saltney, which had been difficult due to the emergency situation. Suggestions were being considered around providing the consultation document electronically to ensure a high level of engagement. She reassured Members that this project remained a high priority.

In response to comments made by Councillor Patrick Heesom, the Leader of the Council advised that the local authority had significantly invested in schools located in the west of Flintshire and outlined recent projects.

Mrs. Wendy White thanked the Senior Manager and his Team for his support. She commented on the need for Catholic schools to provide 15% funding as part of a project and raised concerns that this was not possible for small schools. She advised that Welsh Government (WG) were currently being lobbied to re-consider this going forward to ensure schools were not left out because of the lack of funding.

The recommendation outlined within the report was moved by Councillor Janet Axworthy and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the content of the report and progress of the School Modernisation programme.

36. SCHOOLS COVID LESSONS LEARNED & RISK ASSESSMENTS

The Chief Officer introduced the report and thanked the and thanked the Corporate Health and Safety Advisor and Health & Safety Team for the support provided to schools during the emergency situation. She outlined the changes which had been introduced around risk assessments and reassured Members that schools were working safely and continually monitoring the situation.

The Corporate Health and Safety Advisor reported on the advice and support provided to Schools and advised that all school risk assessments had been reviewed twice, with clear feedback and recommendations provided where necessary. Following the review of school risk assessments at the end of the autumn term, the Health and Safety Team had produced a report which summarised the key lessons learnt. This had been shared with all schools to ensure continuous improvement of the risk assessment process. Details of the lessons learnt were outlined within Appendix 1 of the report.

Mr. David Hytch thanked the Corporate Health & Safety Advisor for the support provided to schools during the emergency situation. He commented on the lessons learnt document at Appendix 1 and asked whether it was appropriate for school governors to actively conduct safety inspections of school premises and raised concerns around the risks to them. The Corporate Health & Safety Advisor agreed that this was currently difficult with the Health & Safety Team also currently limiting inspections. Although it was difficult to carry out physical inspections governors could review documentation and hold discussions with staff instead to ascertain if things were working or not. The Chief Officer explained that this was a recommendation and not a directive and would only take place if the person was willing to visit the school premises and it was safe to do so.

The recommendations outlined within the report were moved by Councillor Paul Cunningham and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee welcome the assurance provided that schools have robust risk assessments in place and effective control measures to maintain safe school environments; and
- (b) That the Committee acknowledged the work of the Corporate Health and Safety Team in supporting schools in the pandemic and note the lessons learned to date.

37. COUNCIL PLAN 2021-22

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) introduced a report to consider the proposed Council Plan for 2020/21 with specific focus on the Committee's respective portfolio. She provided background information and gave a brief summary of the Plan, with particular focus around:-

- The new curriculum for Wales;
- Continued work to raise standards and achievement for young people;
- Youth Service provision;
- Aura Leisure and Library Service;
- Archive Project;
- Additional Learning Needs; and
- Welsh Medium Strategy

The Chief Officer invited the Strategic Performance Advisor to outline the contents of the draft plan and the process for further development. The Strategic Performance Advisor informed the Committee that a number of elements within

the plan had been revised. He provided information on the partnership working across portfolios and said that this would be shared with all Overview & Scrutiny Committees for their feedback. The final draft plan including Overview & Scrutiny committee feedback would then be presented to Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and Council. He added that with regard to monitoring of the Plan, the aim was to be able to demonstrate impact as an authority in a strategic sense, and that the Plan was ambitious but also realistic in view of current circumstances.

In response to a question from Councillor Patrick Heesom, the Chief Officer advised that the summary bid document for the Archive Project was confidential and drew his attention to a number of reports which had been presented to Cabinet and available to view.

Mr. David Hytch congratulated the local authority on an ambitious Council Plan and endorsed the comments made by the Chief Officer. He commented on the 'Green Council' element of the Plan and reported that there had been a loss of 97% of wildflower meadows nationally. He said that the Biodiversity Officer was aware of a national campaign to maintain botanical diversity and asked whether including the creative management of roadside verges to increase botanical diversity, within this priority area, would be helpful in furthering the ambitions of the Biodiversity Officer.

The Chairman welcomed the positive document and suggested that Councillors be encouraged to highlight parts of the Council Plan within their local newsletters to Flintshire residents. He suggested that the well-being of all Council staff be flagged up as an objective with goals set on what the Council would like to achieve. He also commented on the challenges for rural communities and said that he would like to see stronger emphasis on how the Council were addressing the challenges rural communities were facing.

The Chief Officer explained that a significant amount of work had been carried out to ensure the well-being of staff and that this was an internal process, whereas the Council Plan was an outward facing document to present to all resident of Flintshire the priorities of the Council. Officers agreed to feedback the comments and highlight areas within the Council Plan where priorities would assist rural communities.

The recommendation outlined within the report was moved by Councillor Janet Axworthy and seconded by Councillor Tudor Jones.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the developed themes of the Council Plan 2021/22 prior to approval by Cabinet.

38. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2pm and ended at 4.54 pm)

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Chairman