

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
2 FEBRUARY 2023

Minutes of the hybrid meeting of the Education, Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Thursday 2 February 2023.

PRESENT: Councillor Teresa Carberry (Chair)

Councillors: Paul Cunningham, Gladys Healey, Gina Maddison, Dave Mackie, Andrew Parkhurst, Carolyn Preece, David Richardson, Jason Shallcross and Arnold Woolley

CO-OPTEEES: Mrs Lynne Bartlett

APOLOGIES: Mrs Wendy White

SUBSTITUTIONS: Councillor Mel Buckley (for Councillor Ryan McKeown)
Councillor Debbie Owen (for Councillor Bill Crease)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Paul Johnson (Cabinet Member for Finance, Inclusion, Resilient Communities including Social Value and Procurement) attended as an observer

CONTRIBUTORS:

Councillor Ian Roberts, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure; Chief Officer (Education & Youth) and Senior Manager School Improvement
Mr Liam Evans-Ford, Executive Director of Theatr Clwyd and Mr Aled Marshman, Director of Music, Theatr Clwyd Music Trust (for agenda item 43)

IN ATTENDANCE:

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

41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Councillors Andrew Parkhurst and Carolyn Preece declared a personal interest as members of Theatr Clwyd.

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) declared that she was a member of the Music Trust Board.

42. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 1 December 2022 were approved as moved and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey and Councillor Debbie Owen.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

43. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme highlighting updates made since the last meeting. She advised that the school parking report would be submitted to the meeting scheduled for 23 March and that Members of the Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee would be invited to the meeting for this item. She also confirmed that the Council Plan 2023/28 Development report would be presented at the March meeting.

Referring to the Action Tracking Report the Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator confirmed that most of the actions had been completed. A proposed date for the workshop on the Integrated Youth Provision Delivery Plan had been received and she confirmed that once this was confirmed an email would be circulated to Members.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved by Councillor Paul Cunningham and seconded by Mrs Lynne Bartlett.

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.

44. MUSIC SERVICE THEATR CLWYD

The Chair welcomed Mr Liam Evans Ford, Executive Director of Theatr Clwyd and Mr Aled Marshman, Director of Music, Theatr Clwyd Music Trust to the meeting, who would be outlining how they and members of the Theatr Clwyd Music Trust worked to enhance the learning opportunities and experiences of students.

The Chair added that being taught music and the skills of learning to play an instrument helped students to develop their language skills, reasoning skills, their sensitive and critical learning skills and could define motor skill development and improve memory. The creative and performance side of the subject together with a greater understanding of the role in music and history and contemporary society all add to a fuller education for a student. As an authority Flintshire County Council were proactive in their efforts to ensure that every student had an opportunity to enhance their learning experience and promote their talents, regardless of who they were. This included students in receipt of a pupil grant awarded to schools to support students who were eligible for either free school meals or who were looked after. This was a targeted grant given to overcome the barriers which may prevent a student from reaching his or her full potential.

Mr. Liam Evans-Ford introduced a report to provide an update and overview of Theatr Clwyd Music Trust following its first 18 months of delivery, as

set against agreed principles of transfer in 2019 from the Education Portfolio within the Council to Theatr Clwyd. This transfer was designed to initially protect, but also to further enhance, the delivery of music education services to the children and young people of Flintshire which was under threat due to increasing financial pressures on the Council.

Mr. Aled Marshman, in referring to the report, outlined the negative impact the Covid pandemic had had on music and the arts, with a 75% reduction in learners between March 2020 and May 2020. Those students who had remained with the service reported on how important it had been to their health and wellbeing. He provided background information on discussions held in September 2020 on the way forward with the decision taken to remain online for the year but this was challenging and the increase in numbers was slow. In September 2021 returning to schools saw learner numbers doubling but the aim was to grow further to enable every student to have an opportunity to enjoy the benefits of music both socially and culturally.

Mr. Marshman provided detailed information on the scoping document, charging policy and the five ensembles, which had increased to eight following the increased numbers in September 2022. More emphasis had been placed on the new starters to create an important journey for them and he provided information on the flexibility of the system in place for schools. Information was also provided on the National Plan for Music Education in Wales which would support the Curriculum for Wales, especially in primary schools, with the focus on every year 3 child experiencing at least two terms in music.

Mr. Evans-Ford summarised the future challenges which were the costs to schools, costs to families and making the most of those first experiences and continuing pathways.

The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure, referred to his time as a child in school learning to play the piano and flute and later as a teacher with the excellent music tradition both choral and instrumental which had existed in the schools. He commented on the opportunities available through the Pupil Development Grant and other mechanisms which would enable all young people to have this valuable experience, equally for sport, music, arts and going to theatres. He was delighted with the progress made and he thanked Theatr Clwyd and the Music Director for all the work carried out in this area and fully supported them in their aims for the children of Flintshire.

Councillor Carolyn Preece thanked Mr. Evans-Ford and Mr. Marshman for the presentation of their report and suggested that a letter be sent to all Headteachers to encourage schools to promote the delivery of the music service, specifically targeting children eligible for free school meals and looked after children. This suggestion was supported by the Committee.

In response to questions from Councillor Dave Mackie around on-line learning and cost, Mr. Marshman referred to learning from Covid saying that working in a digital world to create an active session rather than a passive one when teaching beginners was key. The online platform was still being used with lessons learnt for example on microphone usage and frequencies of instruments.

Families were still taking up the online offer in conjunction with the in person offer providing more flexibility and enabling learners to stay with the same tutor even if they had moved out of the area. Mr. Evans-Ford also provided information on the group costs which were dispersed against one-to-one costs saying that the new charging system was more transparent.

In response to comments on first experiences, the Mr. Marshman confirmed that this was two terms which was free to schools, pupils, and families. At the end of the two terms, concerts were arranged to show to parents what could be achieved, and information was then given to parents to take home to consider continuing with the learning. In referring to the Pupil Development Grant and Free School Meals, he fully understood that these budgets were under pressure and could be applied in several ways. He fully supported the suggestion to write to head teachers to ask if music could be promoted as one of the options. Mr. Evans-Ford outlined the opportunities which were available because the Council had moved to the current model which included Trust and Foundation Grants. Discussions were progressing with these foundations to obtain more grant funding which was not linked to the Free School Meals or Development Grants.

In response to a question from Councillor Parkhurst around the charging structure model, Mr. Marshman confirmed the charging structure model was created three years ago when the cost of living was not at the level it was today. He provided an overview of the costs of group lessons with the modelling carried out at the start with the charge reducing from £53.20 p/hour in the old model to £38.20 p/hour in the new model. The hourly charge was the same whether it was group or individual lessons. He said that he was proud of the quality and standard of music associates which had enabled top quality provision. Mr. Evans-Ford explained that when this change was put in place its main aim was to keep music teachers employed with neighbouring authorities choosing to make their musicians redundant and close their services. He confirmed that one of the aims over the forthcoming years was to continue reducing those costs for families and schools.

Councillor Parkhurst said that the hourly charge of £38.20 being the same for group and individual sessions was correct in respect to the cost to schools but this was not the situation for the cost to parents or others who fund the music lessons where there was a subsidy for group session and individual lessons, and therefore, this was more expensive and cost more than could be achieved by private lessons.

Mr. Marshman outlined the work carried out over the last couple of years to make the website and app more user friendly. Direct Debit payments had also been introduced to help families spread the costs. The website was built for music services to enable schools, families and the music service to use them but it was quite new and not widely used in the UK. This was a learning curve but was improving.

In response to questions from the Cabinet Member for Finance, Inclusion, Resilient Communities including Social Value and Procurement around the first experience pilots, Mr. Marshman confirmed that this was targeted work. The first

experiences pilots at Golftyn and Queensferry were for every child with the music associate identifying those young people who enjoyed and thrived in these sessions. The feedback from all the pilot schools was key as well as the lessons learnt from the winter of well-being which was integral to achieving those increased numbers. Engagement with parents to come and see their young people enjoying the sessions and showcasing what they had learnt had to come via the schools. Mr. Ford-Evans explained that the challenges were, exciting young people, ensuring the parents valued it, and that Headteachers were on board. The successful stories were in schools where Headteachers promoted music and allowed their pupils to commence their musical journey.

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) expressed her thanks on behalf of the education portfolio on the innovative and creative ways the services had worked to protect something that was so valued in Flintshire. The development of the model took a long time working with the music service, schools and professional associations to ensure it was successful and she was delighted that it was continuing to thrive although in a different model. She paid tribute to Mr. Marshman who, through his work developing the National Music Plan as the ADEW representative for Flintshire, had shaped discussions at a national level. Welsh Government (WG) had recognised that music services were under threat and had made significant amounts of funding available to protect this opportunity for the children of Wales. She outlined the discussions held with schools on how this model could be sustained with commitments to reduce the charges and that this report provided a baseline of where the service was at currently.

The Chair thanked Mr. Evans-Ford and Mr. Marshman for their attendance and asked that they convey to their staff the Committee's thanks for their skills, enthusiasm, knowledge and sheer joy of music that they brought to schools.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, with the additional recommendation to write to Headteachers as previously suggested by Councillor Preece, was moved by Councillor Paul Cunningham and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the developments of the Theatr Clwyd Music Trust, since its creation, including the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic be noted;
- (b) That the Committee is assured that the Theatr Clwyd Music Trust is positively and actively delivering on the National Music Service Plan for the benefit of children and young people in Flintshire; and
- (c) That a letter is sent, on behalf of the Committee, to all Headteachers to encourage schools to promote the delivery of the music service, specifically targeting children eligible for free school meals and looked after children.

45. COUNCIL PLAN 2022-23 MID-YEAR PERFORMANCE REPORTING

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) presented the monitoring report to review mid-year progress against the Council Plan priorities identified for

2022/23. The out-turn report for the 2022/23 Council Plan showed 59% of activities were making good progress. 70% of the performance indicators had met or exceeded their targets, 9% were being closely monitored and 21% were currently not meeting target.

There was currently one activity showing a red RAG status relevant to the Committee around upskilling portfolio employees through the GwE professional learning offer and other appropriate training opportunities. The Chief Officer provided information together with details of the circulation of a questionnaire to portfolio employees to understand what training they felt would be beneficial to them. The questionnaires had been returned and were currently being collated to enable an action plan to address the areas of developmental need for the portfolio and this would be in place by April 2023.

The Chair welcomed that the Council's Plan for 2023 was constantly monitored and its progress reviewed and measured against the criteria for success of the actions within it. She thanked the education portfolio staff for the positive education and skills report with the data highlighting the RAG ratings falling between amber, where actions were being progressed or green where actions were complete or on track.

In response to questions from Councillor Dave Mackie around digital learning and Integrated Youth Services, the Chief Officer explained that the Primary Learning Advisor had provided excellent support to schools with regular reviews undertaken of the equipment, software and hardware available to enable improvements in the digital structure. Work was also ongoing to ensure schools were able to access the extensive funding provided by Welsh Government (WG) for this which was reported to the meetings of the Hwb Digital Board. The Senior Manager, School Improvement Systems, outlined the work across Wales in rolling out the Hwb programme with the Primary Learning Advisor undertaking regular audits of the provision available for the 24,000 learners across all schools in Flintshire. Discussions were also held with schools, who had that day-to-day connection with parents, to understand any change in circumstances or difficulties encountered by pupils accessing the digital infrastructure outside school. Ongoing discussions were held with WG about moving this forward and sustaining the national investment through the Hwb Programme to improve the digital structure and deliver the new curriculum.

The Chief Officer referred to the delivery plan for Integrated Youth Services and explained that the targets in the Council Plan were set ahead of this reporting year and would be changed for 2023. The new plan had been developed and a consultation had been carried out with young people with the new Senior Manager in the service revisiting the plan. She explained that Covid was the driver for the digital offer but now that the service was returning to normality the young people had asked for it to be more face-to-face. The target to maintain focus on increased digital engagement would not be taken forward in the new Council Plan as the circumstances and feedback from the young people had changed and the revised target would focus more on enhancements to the face-to-face offer.

Councillor Mackie asked for an update on the construction of the 3 to 16 Campus at Mynydd Isa and development of actions plans in relation to Emotional

Health and Wellbeing. The Chief Officer confirmed that financial close had been achieved and that contractors were on site at Mynydd Isa. She also explained that the Emotional Health and Wellbeing action plans would be formulated in the summer terms with audits completed by the end of March when a figure could be identified.

In response to further questions from Councillor Mackie around digital learning opportunities, alternative provision for young people and Open University targets supported by Aura, the Chief Officer said that she would check with Aura why the increasing take up of digital learning opportunities completed was currently 0% following the meeting and provide a response to the Committee. She also suggested that an officer from Aura be present at future meetings when considering the performance monitoring reports to ensure responses to questions could be provided to the Committee.

The Chief Officer noted comments made by Councillor Andrew Parkhurst around the comments being vague and said that she would ask Aura to provide more specific information, particularly against some of their targets. She also agreed to look at her portfolio's actions to improve the wording where necessary.

In response to a question from Councillor Gladys Healey on provision of digital equipment to those families in poverty, the Chief Officer confirmed that this was taking place. WG had provided significant funding to improve the infrastructure across Wales with schools being audited around the equipment and support provided to families. These families were prioritised during the pandemic to ensure that they had equipment and Wi-Fi to enable pupils to continue to receive their education. It was a priority that there was an equitable offer throughout their schools and all pupils were able to complete the online work set for them. The Senior Manager, School Improvement, added that pupils were also able to use equipment provided at after school homework clubs in libraries with individual school providing different support for their learners and families.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, was moved by Councillor Mel Buckley and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee support the levels of progress and confidence in the achievement of priorities as at mid-year within the 2022/23 Council Plan;
- (b) That the Committee endorse and support overall performance against 2022/23 Council Plan performance indicators as at mid-year; and
- (c) That the Committee is assured by explanations given for those areas of underperformance.

46. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 p.m. and ended at 3.21 pm)

.....

Chair