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Sir y Fflint Flintshire COUNTY COUNCIL

Contact Officer:
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To: Cllr Teresa Carberry (Chair)

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

Co-opted Members:
Lisa Allen, Lynn Bartlett and Wendy White

8 September 2023

Dear Sir/Madam

<u>**NOTICE OF HYBRID MEETING**</u>
<u>**EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**</u>
<u>**THURSDAY, 14TH SEPTEMBER, 2023 at 2.00 PM**</u>

Yours faithfully

Steven Goodrum
Democratic Services Manager

Please note: Attendance at this meeting is either in person in the Lord Barry Jones Council Chamber, Flintshire County Council, County Hall, Mold, Flintshire or on a virtual basis.

The meeting will be live streamed onto the Council's website. The live streaming will stop when any confidential items are considered. A recording of the meeting will also be available, shortly after the meeting at https://flintshire.public-i.tv/core/portal/home

If you have any queries regarding this, please contact a member of the Democratic Services Team on 01352 702345.

A G E N D A

1 APOLOGIES

Purpose: To receive any apologies.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Purpose: To receive any Declarations and advise Members accordingly.

3 MINUTES (Pages 5 - 30)

Purpose: To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the joint meeting held with the Social & Health Care Committee on the 29 June and the meeting held on 13 July 2023.

4 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING (Pages 31 - 42)

Report of Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator

Purpose: To consider the Forward Work Programme of the Education, Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee and to inform the Committee of progress against actions from previous meetings.

5 ANNUAL REPORT FROM REGIONAL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT SERVICE (GWE) (Pages 43 - 72)

Report of Chief Officer (Education and Youth) - Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure

Purpose: To receive an update on the support provided by the regional school effectiveness and improvement service, GWE and its impact on schools.

6 SCHOOL RESERVE BALANCES YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2023 (Pages 73 - 86)

Report of Chief Officer (Education and Youth) - Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure

Purpose: To update Members on overall service performance 22-23 and Learner Outcomes from 2022.

7   **<u>SELF-EVALUATION REPORT EDUCATION SERVICES 2022-23</u>** (Pages 87 - 158)

Report of Chief Officer (Education and Youth) - Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure

Purpose: To update Members on overall service performance 22-23 and Learner Outcomes from 2022.

Please note that there may be a 10 minute adjournment of this meeting if it lasts longer than two hours

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JOINT EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE AND SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEES
29 JUNE 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the Joint Education, Youth & Culture and Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committees of Flintshire County Council held on Thursday 29 June 2023.

PRESENT:
Councillors: Mel Buckley, Teresa Carberry, Bill Crease, Paul Cunningham, Carol Ellis, Gladys Healey, Dennis Hutchinson, Dave Mackie, Gina Maddison, Hilary McGuill, Ryan McKeown, Debbie Owen, Andrew Parkhurst, Carolyn Preece, Jason Shallcross, Linda Thomas and Arnold Woolley

CO-OPTED MEMBERS:
Lisa Allen and Lynn Bartlett

APOLOGIES: Councillors: Marion Bateman, Tina Claydon, Jean Davies and Wendy White

SUBSTITUTION: Councillor Glyn Banks (for Councillor David Richardson)

CONTRIBUTORS:
Councillor Ian Roberts (Leader of the Council); Councillor Mared Eastwood (Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure); Councillor Christine Jones (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Social Services and Wellbeing); Chief Officer (Education & Youth), Chief Officer (Social Services), Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) (for minute numbers 3,6 and 7), Learning Adviser for EAL, Gypsy Travellers and Children Looked After (CLA) (for minute numbers 3 and 7),
Senior Manager (Children and Workforce) (for minute numbers 3 and 4),
Senior Manager for School Improvement (for minute number 5).

1. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR**

    Councillor Teresa Carberry nominated Councillor Arnold Woolley as Chair of the meeting. This was seconded by Councillor Hilary McGuill

    RESOLVED:

    That Councillor Arnold Woolley be appointed as Chair for the joint meeting

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)**

    Councillor Hilary McGuill declared a personal interest as a school governor and that her daughter was a teacher.
    The Facilitator explained that for any Members who were schools governors and had completed their declaration form, no declaration was required.

3.   LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IN FLINTSHIRE

Prior to presenting the report the Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) introduced Lisa Davies (Learning Adviser for EAL, Gypsy Travellers and Children Looked After (CLA) to Committee.

Referring to the report the Senior Manager clarified that following discussions with the children and young people the terminology for looked after children was changing to "children who were looked after." The first section outlined the number of children who were supported by this service with most of these young people educated in the Authority's primary and secondary schools. A third of these young people required specialist provision which was provided outside of Flintshire. Members were directed to the final table in section 1.02 which outlined the increased number of children who were looked after in primary schools.

Following requests by Members, information on the success and outcomes of the twenty-seven young people was provided in Year 11 for 2022, with 48% having a statement of Special Educational Need or Educational Health Care Plan.   An overview of the Cognitive Ability Test for all year 7 pupils was also given which had enabled the Authority to establish predictors of the outcomes that could be achieved, and this data had been compared with the actual outcomes of these pupils. Detail on the level of qualifications and progression pathways was given with the majority progressing to further education, with four individuals who were not in education, employment or training. The attendance levels for children who were looked after was very positive as they were supported to engage in their education. There were situations where attendance had been poor and information on the reason for poor attendance was outlined within the report. It was explained that the level of exclusions for children who were looked after was high and work was ongoing with the schools to address this.

Members were referred to section 1.06 in the report which outlined the interventions and initiatives which had been put in place to support vulnerable learners. Information was provided on the appointment of the Nurturing Support Practitioner working with the Nurture Outreach Team, previously the Behavioural Support Service, with an explanation of the name change and focus. The Senior Manager then provided information on the Digital Development Portrait developed by Nurture International to improve nurturing practices and she outlined how beneficial this had been to schools and families to support the development of these individuals.

Children and young people were able to feed back to the service what they felt worked successfully and what could be done differently to support them. Welsh Government (WG) had commissioned Sir Alasdair McDonald to advise on how best to move forward with one of the areas being the development of virtual schools in each local authority to focus on the learners that were looked after. It was explained that an application for additional funding to support this was made to WG which was refused because the model focussed on vulnerable learners and not just those who were looked after. Following further discussions with WG it was disclosed that it was not possible to re-apply until after the current funding stream came to an end in three years' time. In the meantime, the Learning Advisor for EAL, Gypsy Travellers and

Children Looked After (CLA) had been in discussions with other authorities to understand how that model was working and pulling together all this information which would be provided to the Working Party that had been established across Education and Children's Services. This would enable the Authority to set up the processes that would be required to implement that model.

Responding to the clarification question on the Virtual Head Teacher from Councillor Dave Mackie, the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) explained that the bid to Welsh Government (WG) was to ensure that this cohort of learners had the benefit of the focused leadership similar to a school. As the learners were spread across several schools having that leadership responsibility for this group of learners would ensure that the provision was appropriate, that their progress was monitored similar to a head teacher in a school. The Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) agreed saying that it was looking at the needs of the individual and ensuring that the support services were provided. The model advocated by WG suggested that a range of support was required sitting under the Head Teacher to enable them to conduct their roles effectively.

Councillor Bill Crease was pleased to see that the Working Group would be ensuring the Personal Educational Plans were accurate, consistent and identified the needs and solutions of these individuals in a consistent way. The Senior Manager advised that the Eclipse System was being used for additional learning needs and that the information for the Personal Educational Plans was collated on this system. Schools would have all the information in one place which would improve the knowledge and awareness of these the needs of the individuals.

Councillor Andrew Parkhurst was pleased to see how much positive work was being undertaken to support children who were looked after. He asked the following questions:

- In response to the question on the increased number of pupils in special schools, the Senior Manager confirmed that this was needs based and varied from year to year and cohort to cohort. This level of provision was in response to the needs of the current cohort of pupils. The Learning Advisor said the number varied each year but the number of out of county independent specialist provision had reduced which was positive.
- Responding to the question on the reason for the increased percentage of out of county placements, the Senior Manager said that this would be for wherever these pupils were placed. Out of county did not only refer to the specialist provision but also where they resided with family, carers or foster parents. Sometimes the only provision for an individual could be in an alternative Authority rather than in Flintshire.
- With regard to the question on placement breakdown and outcomes and how this was being addressed, the Senior Manager confirmed that it was dependent upon those individual children and how they were able to cope in particular provisions. Colleagues in Children's Servicers worked hard to ensure the right placements were made and that they were supported. If that placement broke down, then the services

worked collaboratively to ensure that a learner was moved to an alternative educational placement as quickly as possible.

The Senior Manager (Children and Workforce) reassured members that a stable placement was what was desired for these learners. Over the last two months a renewal of a specialist service with Action for Children "WRAP" worked intensively with foster care placements if they were at risk of breakdown. Intensive therapeutic support would be provided to try and avoid placement breakdown. There were also incidents where some registered residential care homes were not tolerating certain behaviours and were serving immediate notice on children which was not acceptable. This was a pattern which was starting to emerge and one of the reasons Flintshire was now rebalancing and investing in its provision.

- Responding to a question concerning the percentage of children who were looked after who were included in the 15% of Not in Education, Employment or Training. The Senior Manager confirmed the figure for 2021 was 1.8% of the Flintshire population who left school who were not in education, employment or training. There was a higher percentage for those who were looked after.
- With regard to the question on attendance and whether the bar was too low to measure this, the Senior Manager confirmed the figure for persistent absenteeism saying the Authority aspired for attendance rates over 90%, The impact as a result of Covid and the legacy of that was that attendance was significantly reduced across all schools with overall attendance in the region of 90%.

Councillor Parkhurst referred to the last meeting of the Education Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee where he had requested a breakdown of exclusions for children who were looked after compared to other pupils. The absolute number of exclusions was known for 2021/22 which was 1704 with over 20% of children who were looked after having been excluded but he did not know how this compared to other pupils. He referred to the national data which suggested children who were looked after were more likely to be excluded because of their challenging behaviour and asked who advocated for these children when this happened, how robust was this and were the decisions of the schools left unchallenged.

In response, the Senior Manager confirmed that in terms of advocacy the Authority was the Corporate Parent for those children and so had a duty to be supportive of them and she explained how Social Workers and Education Officers participated in that process working with the schools. However it was the head teacher's decision whether they wished to exclude or not. Work was ongoing with schools to improve their understanding of Trauma Informed Practice which was a priority for the Education and Social Services portfolios on the impact of exclusion on those learners. As school governors she felt Members would have a role to support this move against exclusion for children who were looked after.

Councillor Carol Ellis referred to the unsuccessful funding bid and asked what this would have been used for and what affect not having that funding would make to the service. In response, the Senior Manager confirmed that there was an offer of £40,000 from Welsh Government (WG) to support the implementation of a virtual

Head Teacher and was part funding to put that system in place. In the absence of that funding an Action Plan had been drawn up for Flintshire in response to the recommendations from Sir Alasdair McDonald's report looking at the current situation in Flintshire and the research conducted by the Learning Advisor with other authorities which had identified a way to move forward.

The Chief Officer reassured Members that the portfolio robustly challenged Welsh Government (WG) on the rejection of the plan. The Authority's concern was that this funding was not a sustainable model and would not fully cover the cost of a virtual Head Teacher. The expectation was that the person who undertook that role would have no other senior responsibilities. The funding was insufficient and would put pressure back on the Authority's budget in 3 years' time when it came to an end. It was felt that the Authority's plan was very robust which demonstrated that within the current structure within the Inclusion Service through the expertise of our Senior Officers that there was sufficient capacity to deliver the requirements of the recommendations from Sir Alasdair McDonald.

The Senior Manager said that there was a commitment to monitor the learning outcomes and provision for these learners but there were resource requirements. The development of the Action Plan would ensure that for example that the Personal Educational Plans was a quality document. The Working Group would look at all aspects of the requirements and working with Chief Officers to see if additional resources could be made available to support this going forward with the model which could be used without the virtual school.

The Learning Advisor referred to the aims and recommendations of the virtual schools which were around understanding the needs of the children, the data analysis and ensuring school staff were trained. Although the Authority did not have a virtual school, significant progress had been made on those recommendations using the tool from Nurture International to analyse the wellbeing of all learners, regardless of whether they were in Flintshire schools or not.

Councillor Hilary McGuill referred to Corporate Parents saying that all Councillors were corporate parents and asked when training for all Members would commence. In response, the Senior Manager (Children and Workforce) confirmed that training on Corporate Parenting had been added to the Training Programme.

Councillor McGuill referred the four children were not in education, employment or training and asked if it was known what these children were doing at present. In response the Senior Manager confirmed that the Engagement Progression Coordinator had responsibility to monitor the provision and engagement for all young people up to the age of 18 years under the Youth Engagement Progression Framework. The Coordinator monitored all learners across Flintshire who were not engaged and what support was being offered to them. The Senior Manager agreed to gather this information and circulate to Committee.

Councillor McGuill then referred to Exclusions and asked where the Authority was within the Welsh national figures. The Senior Manager reported that Covid had severely impacted the comparison data previously collected by WG. When that data

was available it did not contain a breakdown with regard to different cohorts so it would be difficult to compare with other authorities.

The first recommendation, outlined within the report, was moved and seconded by Councillors Hilary McGuill and Teresa Carberry.

The second recommendation, outlined within the report, was moved and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey and Teresa Carberry.

RESOLVED:

(a)   That Members actively engage as Corporate Parents for children who were looked after, promoting awareness and challenge provision within Flintshire educational settings; and

(b)   That Members actively encourage all education staff to promote the educational welfare of children who were looked after within Flintshire establishments at a 'whole school level.'

4.   **HELP AND SUPPORT FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS**

The Senior Manager (Children and Workforce) presented the report which included an overview of the range of support provided for children who were looked after in Flintshire and the recommended service priorities for the work undertaken with these children. The priority and focus was around preventing children from becoming looked after and Members were directed to sections of the report which highlighted the range of services working together to ensure when safe and appropriate that children did not enter the care system. The commitment to ensure that parents, carers, families, who had the capacity to safely support their children, were supported which included a range of support and therapies which were accessed via Action for Children. Information on the range of support provided to support children once they came into the care system was set out in the report.

An outline of the Active Offer was given which included the right for each child to access an independent advocate and information on the scope of what this covered was given. Members were referred to section 1.16 in the report which promoted "Listening and hearing the voice of looked after children." The Children's Services Forum linked into the Young Persons Participation Group where young people met to explore themes which were important to them, and these young people represented Flintshire on national forums. The Senior Manager commented on a young person's visit to meet the First Minister in Cardiff where discussions included the care leavers services and the "When I am Ready" initiative. The service had recently obtained grant funding to purchase a bespoke App "Mind of my own" and an overview of the benefits using this App was provided.

The Senior Manager then moved on to Corporate Parenting advising that the Authority was responsible for 250 children with the Corporate Parenting Strategy developed in 2018 and endorsed in 2019. It was proposed to review this in the autumn. An overview of the five themes within the Corporate Parenting Strategy was given which included Home, Education and Learning, Health and Well-being,

Leisure and Employment Opportunities. An outline of the work of the Personal Assistants supporting these young people was also provided. Across Wales a Young People and Adults Charter had been developed to support them in the care system, when they were care leavers and about to become parents. The working group was ensuring that the Charter was able to undertake and deliver the additional expectations to these young people. The Health Liaison Officer for the Early Help Hub had procured funding to provide further education and training for care leavers this would provide continued learning opportunities for these young people.

In response to a comment from Councillor Bill Crease on Corporate Training the Chief Officer (Social Services) reported that this had been raised as a priority and that he would take this as an action from the meeting to ensure that it was provided as soon as possible to Members.

Councillor Hilary McGuill felt the Corporate Parenting Training was a priority and should be provided before September for all Members. Referring to the recommendations she wished to add "that the Corporate Training was progressed as a priority." This was supported by the Committee.

Councillor McGuill referred to the Welsh Government (WG) announcement for money for care leavers and asked how this affected Flintshire's care leavers. She asked how much they received and was it possible to ensure the money was spent wisely on driving lessons or money management. In response, the Senior Manager explained the "Basic Income Pilot" was a 2-year WG initiative for a specific cohort of care leavers. For that 2-year period it guaranteed them a monthly income of £1600 to use toward their rent. These young people with the help of their PAs entered the application process. The Citizens Advice Bureau offered advice around budget management with practical support provided for setting up the Direct Debits to pay their rent and provided advice on budgeting and saving. Links had been made with WG around learning with an evaluation process taking place to understand the strengths, benefits, risks and challenges which would be fed back to WG. Overall, this had been very positive and he suggested that a report on this be brought to Committee at a later date.

Councillor McGuill asked how many young people would be affected. In response the Senior Manager agreed to obtain this information and circulate it to Members following the meeting.

Councillor Gladys Healey had concerns that when these young people left care and were placed in accommodation and that they would be targeted by drug gangs and seen as vulnerable. She felt when the money ran out would they be pulled into selling drugs to make money especially if they were placed in areas where this practice was prevalent.

The Senior Manager reported that not all children left their placements at 18 or when they finished their education. The "When I'm Ready" initiative allowed a young person placed in foster placement to remain there and move when they were ready. This was provided the foster carers were willing and able to continue as they would also receive reduced payments for this.   A lot of children also moved back to their original home and families at 18 which was sometimes positive. A pathway plan

was developed for children when they reached 16 years which included re-introductions with family members to ensure that they remained safe. Referring to those care leavers who did require accommodation they were placed in priority band one and work was undertaken with Housing colleagues when they reached 16 to develop their pathway plan. The PA responsible for that young person worked to support them through their education and ensured they were job ready for employment.

The Chief Officer (Social Services) referred to the fourth priority, producing proposals for the further expansion of inhouse residential care and fostering to support children locally, and referred to the Out of County Workshop held during the pandemic. He reported on the first CSIWR Registration two weeks ago with another four expected, which provided five Flintshire run care homes, with the aim to move forward with more developments which was needed. However, resources were required for this which was difficult given the challenging circumstances the Authority faced

The Chair referred to the proposed amendment to the recommendations around compulsory Corporate Parenting training and sought Members views on how to progress.

Councillor McGuill asked that the training be arranged as soon as possible for all Members. The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) agreed to ask for this training to be arranged as quickly as possible and the Facilitator agreed to take this back as an action from the meeting and for an update to the provided to both Committees following the meeting.

The Chair referred to comments made by Councillor Carol Ellis that planning Committee members had to complete the training before being able to sit on the Planning Committee. He was sure that similar rules could be brought in where appropriate that Members who sat on particular Committees that require particular skills must undertake the relevant training to do so. The Leader of the Council thought that compulsory training may require a change to the Constitution as it was mandated only on Governance and Audit and Planning Committee.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services and Wellbeing explained that this was not mandatory training but that all Members of this joint Committee wished for it to be provided as soon as possible. She felt the Safeguarding Training was a priority and urged all members to undertake this training also.

Councillor McGuill referred to 1.18 in the report which referred to the new App "Mind of my Own" and asked that there were levels of security in place to stop anyone who should not be accessing it from being able to do so. In response the Senior Manager confirmed its security was guaranteed as it had been through rigorous checks with Governance, Data Protection and all the layers of security.

The amended recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillor Hilary McGuill and Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee support the range of services that were provided to support looked after children and the priorities for service development which centred on:-

  i. Implementing an App to support engagement and the voice of looked after children;
  ii. Refreshing the Corporate Parenting Strategy with an action plan for service support and delivery across portfolios;
  iii. Developing a Charter for parents in and leaving care; and
  iv. Producing proposals for the further expansion of inhouse residential care and fostering to support children locally.

5. **SAFEGUARDING IN EDUCATION INCLUDING INTERNET SAFETY AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

  The Senior Manager for School Improvement explained the Education & Youth Portfolio Safeguarding Panel was established 2 years ago and fed into the Authority's Corporate Safeguarding Panel. The Panel was embedded across the portfolio with regards to procedures and progressed the ongoing improvement work regarding safeguarding and enabled Senior Managers to be kept up to date with regard to local, regional and national themes and information around safeguarding. Last year detailed work was undertaken in schools on Annual Auditing and Evaluation of Safeguarding, particularly following on from the Covid pandemic. This enabled a better understanding of where schools were with regards to safeguarding which had positively supported them by keeping safeguarding at the heart of their work. The Annual Report was something schools were requested to provide every year with the Audit Tool update provided every two years, but this remained a live document in the school. Information on the response rate for the Annual Report was provided and these would be reviewed during the summer with an update provided by the Chief Officer in the new academic year.

  Section 1.05 of the report highlighted the strong commitment in Flintshire schools for professional development around Safeguarding which was supported by the high participation rates, the feedback received from schools and the impact which was seen in schools. The Senior Manager paid tribute to the work undertaken by the Learning Adviser for Health, Well-being and Safeguarding in this area. An Overview of the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), a statutory requirement in the new Curriculum for Wales Framework, was provided at section 1.06 in the report. She commended the work undertaken by the Healthy Schools Officers in readiness for the new Curriculum, RSE and the professional development programme working closely with colleagues across North Wales. Section 1.08 in the report provided an overview of the training provided and ongoing work through the cluster model delivering collaborative professional development across Flintshire schools, with section 1.10 providing a summary of the Consent Project and she provided an update on the Theatr Clwyd and Youth Service partnership which had increased the programme delivery to schools.

  The Senior Manager paid tribute to the commitment of all school staff around the safeguarding work conducted every day, especially Head Teachers, the

Designated Safeguarding Persons (DSPs) and Lead Governors. They worked tirelessly to safeguard all children and young people in Flintshire.

Councillor Hilary McGuill referred to the list of accessible background documents and asked if there was any recordings or information available to parents on for example "the dark web" and watching what their children were accessing via their mobile phones. She understood information on this was available for teachers, but she wondered if there was a forum that parents could be directed to from the Council's website.

The Senior Manager reported that Welsh Government (WG) had been working to address this and that Members would be aware of Hwb (the National Learning Platform for Wales). On this site there was a public facing section, the online safety zone which included guidance which everyone could access and included Parental Guides, Animations and leaflets. Information from this site was shared via the National Safeguarding in Education Group and the Learning Adviser for Health, Well-being and Safeguarding was the Authority's representative on that Group. Information requests from schools and parents was fed back to this Group. She agreed to check the Flintshire website to ensure that this was clearly signposted to parents and also agreed to share the link to the Hwb website to Members following the meeting.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved and seconded by Councillor Teresa Carberry and Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the content of the Safeguarding in Education report and supported the officers on the strategies used by the Portfolio to effectively discharge its duties.

6. **ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS AND EDUCATION TRIBUNAL (WALES) ACT 2018**

The Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) introduced Paula Roberts, Senior Learning Advisor for Additional Learning Needs to the Committee who would be leading the Council through the changes ALNET brought for the portfolio.

The report provided an overview of the changes in the legislation, the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, which came into force in 2021 and included changes to Post 16 Education. Under the previous Special Educational Needs (SEN) system the Council had responsibility for children with a Statement for SEN who accessed continual education in a school-based provision up to the age of 19 years. Under the new legislation this now included responsibility from zero to the age of 25 years for any individual who required additional support for their learning needs in Education and now included further education establishments. If these post sixteen young people were identified as having Additional Learning Need then an Individual Development Plan would be completed which had legal protection under the Act.

An overview was given of the updated processes to support Post 16 young people with discussions held with local colleges commencing at year 11 this year for those young people with ALN and the process that would be implemented for any requiring Independent Specialist Provision (ISP). This was a person-centred approach which included a review meeting in Year 11 which would be attended by a range of officers, the Designated Post 16 ALN Officer who led on this together with the young person, parents and any other professionals involved to identify what was required to support that young person. Previously responsibility for this lay with Careers Wales and Welsh Government (WG) and an outline of how this worked was provided with WG securing funding for the more specialist provision. This year the responsibility for decision making around provision had passed to the Authority and a review of the needs of these young people Post 16 was being undertaken. Currently WG were retaining the funding for this Specialist Post 16 provision for the next 2 years and the Authority had to make returns to WG with the funding coming back to the Authority via the Local Authority Education Grant. A consultation was underway at present on what the model of the delegated funding to the local authorities would be once the 2-year period came to an end. The proposed model had raised a number of concerns from local authorities that the funding coming back to the authorities would not match the spending on these areas and this had been flagged as a potential resources risk. It was highlighted that there were a number of officers which include the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) who were working with WG to raise the challenge around the model and to input on where that funding would be delegated.

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

RESOLVED:

(a)   That the Committee recognise the revised duties places on the Council by ALNET and the actions undertaken to implement the new system; and

(b)   That the Committee note the potential financial pressure due to the revised post-16 funding model and support officers in their engagement with Welsh Government.

7.   **SUPPORTING REFUGES IN SCHOOLS**

In presenting the report, the Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) paid tribute to the work and passion of Lisa Davies (Learning Adviser for EAL, Gypsy Travellers and Children Looked After (CLA) and her team. The report outlined the three scenarios in which refugees came to Flintshire being the Ukrainian Sponsorship Scheme, Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy scheme or Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. Through these three schemes several children and families had come to live in Flintshire.

The report highlighted the core values and principles that the Authority had utilised, with multi agency working integral to the approach and response to support those children and families coming into the County. Education within the local schools was a priority but was not easy to achieve especially for Ukrainian families

who were placed in hotels whilst alternative provision was secured for them with some families having to move a number of times before finding their final placement. Work was undertaken to ensure there were as few moves as possible to ensure the children were able to be integrated into their education as quickly as possible.

It was essential that knowledgeable, empathetic and trauma informed practitioners were in place with resources to inform schools and officers and these key documents, were instrumental in ensuring they were available to officers and families. These documents ensured parents had a better understanding of the Authority's education and support systems engaging with them.

The Senior Manager reported that the Council had established an Emergency Management Response Team led by the Chief Executive which brought together all of the key services across the portfolios to enable the families to relocate into Flintshire communities and have their needs met. Separate weekly meetings were held with the Education Response Team which ensured that the multi-agency response was in place looking at individual needs and interventions which could be offered across the portfolio. Referring to resources it was confirmed that the provision which had been offered was cost neutral because of the funding from the Home Office to support delivery but this funding was time limited, and work had been undertaken to ensure that the funding was allocated appropriately.

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) was very proud of the response to this and paid testament to the Learning Adviser and her team for the huge personal and professional investment that they had made supporting all the children and families coming to Flintshire. The response received from the schools had been excellent and showed the Council carrying out the commitments of the City of Sanctuary. Estyn had requested that the Council contributed some work on the thematic review that they were currently undertaking around the support for refugee and asylum seeker families which gave an opportunity for the Learning Adviser and a number of schools who participated in a visit from Estyn to share the excellent work that was undertaken. It was hoped that when the report was published later in the year that the work Flintshire had undertaken would be recognised through some positive case studies.

Councillor Hilary McGuill thanked the whole of the education system in Flintshire for the support provided to refugees. She reported in her own ward where a number of Ukrainian, Afghan and Syrian refugees had settled in marvellously which was down to the support from the Authority and schools. The people who lived around those families had gone above and beyond to ensure those families integrated into the local community. She felt the mothers of the Afghan children did not have a strong enough mechanism and they needed to speak more English and asked if this could be taken on board. She also personally thanked Dawn Spence who had worked so hard with the Afghan families.

Councillor Paul Cunningham said the refugees were pleased to see their national flag flying all around Flintshire and made them feel so welcome. He was glad that Flintshire took this stance welcoming refugees from countries who were suffering tremendously.

Councillor Bill Crease spoke in favour of everything Flintshire was doing to support these families and reported on his trip to a local primary school where he spent time speaking to a 7-year-old Ukrainian boy whose English language skills were astonishing. He proposed an amendment to the recommendation as follows :-

- That the Committee support the positive actions and outcomes achieved by officers and schools to support the refugee learners and families living in Flintshire.

The amendment to the recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved and seconded by Councillors Bill Crease and Hilary McGuill

RESOLVED:

That the Committee support the positive actions and outcomes achieved by officers and schools to support the refugee learners and families living in Flintshire.

8. **MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE**

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.10 pm)

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Chair

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EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
13 JULY 2023

Minutes of the hybrid meeting of the Education, Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Thursday 13 July 2023.

PRESENT: Councillor Teresa Carberry (Chair)
Councillors: Bill Crease, Paul Cunningham, Gladys Healey, Dave Mackie, Ryan McKeown, Andrew Parkhurst, Carolyn Preece, David Richardson, Jason Shallcross and Arnold Woolley

CO-OPTEES: Lisa Allen and Lynne Bartlett,

APOLOGIES: Wendy White

CONTRIBUTORS:
Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure,
Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
Senior Manager (School Improvement) (for minute numbers 13 and 14)
Learning Adviser – Health, Well-Being and Safeguarding (for minute number 14)
Senior Manager, Youth Justice and Flintshire Sorted (for minute number 15)
Managing Director (NEWydd) (for minute number 17)
The IT Infrastructure Services Manager (for minute number 18)

IN ATTENDANCE:
Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Officers

10. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS**

    None were received.

11. **MINUTES**

    In response to a question from Councillor Andrew Parkhurst on the Regional Skills Partnership Board, the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) agreed to speak to the Facilitator to ensure that it was included in the Forward Work Programme.

    The minutes of the meeting held on the 11 May 2023 were approved as moved and seconded by Councillor Dave Mackie and Councillor Gladys Healey.

    RESOLVED:

    That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 May 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

12. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING**

In presenting the report, the Democratic Services Manager outlined the items scheduled for the forthcoming meetings which were attached at Appendix 1 to the report. There were no additional items to be included apart from the item identified by Councillor Andrew Parkhurst and he agreed to consult with the Facilitator to ensure that it was included. Information was then provided on the Member Workshops on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and Budget 2024-24 and Corporate Parenting.

The Democratic Services Manager then provided an update on the Action Tracking report at Appendix 2. The proposals for compulsory Corporate Parenting Training would need to wait until the results of the Penn Review consultation were known but the Democratic Services Manager confirmed that it was on the Forward Work Programme for the Constitution & Democratic Services Committee.

Councillor Gladys Healey referred to the online Corporate Parenting Training and felt that in person sessions for Members were better. The Democratic Services Manager confirmed that an online session had been arranged following the request for it to be held prior to the recess and at short notice. The session would provide a generalised view of Corporate Parenting and include the WLGA handbook and attachment outlining what the role entailed. The Council was currently reviewing its Corporate Parenting Strategy and it was proposed to deliver two further sessions, one in person and one remote, in the Autumn once the Strategy was revised and refreshed. The training would include specific themes for Flintshire, and it was also proposed to invite some of the Young People to speak to Members and answer questions.

Councillor Andrew Parkhurst thanked officers for providing the data for children who were looked after and excluded from school. The figure of 20% was much higher than other pupils and referred to national data which indicated that children who were looked after were more likely to be excluded for exhibiting the same type of troubling behaviour as their contemporaries. As Corporate Parents it was incumbent upon the Council to ensure that children who were looked after were not treated differently.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved by Councillor Carolyn Preece 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.

13.   **ESTYN INSPECTION OF ADULT COMMUNITY LEARNING (ACL) WITHIN THE NORTH EAST WALES ADULT COMMUNITY LEARNING PARTNERSHIP**

The Senior Manager (School Improvement) explained that the update report followed the positive Estyn Inspection Report for the Adult Community Learning Partnership undertaken in May 2022. Members had requested that an update on the progress of the recommendations received following that Inspection with Estyn

recognising the Partnerships' areas of strength and development. The four recommendations and an overview of the work undertaken for each recommendation were outlined within the report.

The Senior Manager thanked Dawn Spence, the Adult Community Learning (ACL) and Post 16 Learning Adviser, who she said had been the driving force around implementing the recommendations alongside the work undertaken in the Quality Improvement Plan to enhance and develop the adult learning provision.

Councillor Carolyn Preece commended the team for the excellent progress which had been made and said that previously community education had not been promoted but the Plan enhanced this.

The Chair thanked the team for its partnership approach with the Council being very proactive in this area especially the commitment to promote the Welsh language. She was also pleased that the learners themselves were part of this

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved by Councillor Carolyn Preece and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED:

(a)   That the progress made against the Estyn Inspection was noted; and
(b)   That the Committee was assured by the rigour of improvement planning and evaluation within the Partnership.

14.   HEALTHY SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

The Learning Adviser – Health, Well-Being and Safeguarding presented the update report for Healthy Schools which had been present in schools for over 20 years and was funded by Public Health Wales but led at a Local Authority level. The Healthy Pre-School Scheme followed a similar model with the Scheme providing best practice for the schools to work towards and an outline of the health topics were included within the report. Prior to Covid, schools were assessed on how evidence was collected to support development and information on what schools had achieved had been presented to the Committee. Since Covid the Scheme was under a national review which had coincided with the Curriculum reforms and a relaunch of the Scheme was proposed nationally in Spring 2024. The Healthy Schools Scheme was merging with the Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Well Being and would also be launched in Spring 2024.

The priority had been to support schools to address the whole school approach to evaluate their own provision for well-being in supporting learners and staff, to strengthen the positive areas, address any shortfalls and to develop an action plan for next year. The report included information on the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes (WNHSS) with 82.1% of Flintshire schools engaged with this process, which was higher than the Welsh average of 52%. More than 67% had completed the Self-Assessment Tool which had been well received especially in secondary schools. An update on the RSE Code / Curriculum for Wales and Food and Nutrition in secondary

schools was given. Consultation with learners across secondary schools had been undertaken with their recommendations for improvements included.

The report provided information on the Coordination of Programmes for the Healthy & Sustainable Pre-school Scheme (HSPSS), Food and Fun and Period Dignity. The report also included information on the Vaping Definition which was particularly challenging for Head Teachers in schools. Vaping was sold as an alternative to smoking for adults but there was no long-term evidence available at present on the implications of vaping. Information was provided on the formation of the Incident Response Group and the Authority was providing training for leads in Secondary Schools on the vaping devices, the different levels of chemicals contained within them and how to raise awareness of the risks involved. A smoke free policy had been developed and would be launched in the Autumn term and an outline on how the training would better inform Head Teachers of secondary and primary schools was provided.

Schools continued to receive support around the completion of the School Health Research Network Survey (SHRN) which would be undertaken in the Autumn in secondary schools to enable more local data to be collected. Once the accurate data from all secondary schools had been collected, it would be published in Spring 2024. Changes would then be required on a UK wide level to combat this and the briefing from Ash Wales would support that need for change.

Councillor Dave Mackie commented that he was aware of one school which had tightened their policy on vaping and had seen a dramatic reduction in the amount of vaping. Referring to the new Scheme commencing in 2024, Councillor Mackie suggested that a report outlining the plans and objectives should be presented to the Committee at a future meeting. He said that when updates were presented, it would enable Members to look at the report to understand the stages to see how the objectives were being met.

The Learning Adviser – Health, Well-Being and Safeguarding advised that the focus around the Plan was about the whole school approach, Relationships and Sexuality Education, Food and Nutrition, Food and Fun and Period Dignity. These priorities continued for this year and the objectives were provided at Section 1.06 of the report. Schools had their own plans based on their needs and an analysis which had been undertaken on the responses received to the Whole School Approach audit which would identify common themes across schools which could be shared.

In response to comments by Councillor Mackie around fitness, the Learning Advisor confirmed that Public Health Wales, as part of their Review, would be separating health themes with fitness activities standing alone. This would be prioritised more with Aura and other organisations who supported schools with regard to physical activity.

The Senior Manager, School Improvement advised that clear objectives and priorities would be shared with Members once the new scheme was in place. There were challenges because of Covid, the review of the National Scheme. The authority in the national discussions with Public Health on how the Scheme would develop. Discussions held with the stakeholders would enable those aims and objectives to be

put in place. She paid testament to the hard work of the Learning Adviser and the small team supporting this

       The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved by Councillor Dave Mackie and seconded by Councillor Carolyn Preece.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee confirms that it had received an appropriate level of assurance regarding the work of the Education & Youth Portfolio in supporting schools with meeting the current requirements of the Healthy Schools programme and in preparing for any changes as a result of the national review.

15. **YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN**

       The Senior Manager, Youth Justice and Flintshire provided an overview of the statutory work undertaken by the Youth Justice Service in Flintshire. The Annual Youth Justice Plan was attached to the Plan which was required to be submitted to the Youth Justice Board annually. The Plan incorporated the shared Welsh Government (WG) and Youth Justice Board 'Child First' vision and Trauma Informed organisation with the support of partners in Public Health Wales and Glyndwr University. The service had previously been involved in a pilot in Wales using the Trauma Informed Model through the Enhanced Case Management pilot, and this was building on the success of the pilot and the positive results received. The service wanted to ensure that participation within the operational strategic objectives enabled the voices of the children and young people to be heard to inform the service direction, approaches and resources moving forward. These were included in the Participation Strategy which were agreed last year, and the report provided outcome information on the children and young people who came into the Criminal Justice System and the support they received from the dedicated team.

       There were also changes in the type of offences which were committed last year with the Covid pandemic impacting the data which was able to be collected. There had been a reduction in public order offences, increases in theft offences but violence remained the number one offence and was given additional priority. This coincided with the statutory Service Violence Duty and Youth Action Plan around violence and work was ongoing with the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office to dovetail this within the Serious Violence Strategy. Serious violence referred to a small proportion of the cohort but remained a concern. Another concern for the service was the increased use of custody and remand, with the rates in Flintshire remaining quite low but there had been a slight increase within the last 12 months which related to more serious offences. As a service the use of custody was viewed as a last resort but unfortunately in some circumstances it had to be used as there were challenges around the social care sector for appropriate placements for children and young people. There was a need for a balance between supporting a young person and keeping the community safe.

       The Senior Manager reported on the future plans for the service and the impacts on the cohort to ensure they all received a positive experience together with addressing issues of disproportionality within the wider Criminal Justice System.

In outlining the challenges for the year ahead, the report outlined the resource implications and the unique way the service received grant funding. This was provided by WG, the Ministry of Justice, Youth Justice Board and statutory partners such as Police, Probation Service, Health and other services. The Senior Manager explained how the efficiencies and the cost-of-living challenges encountered by the Council's partners had impacted the budget which the service received. Recruitment remained a challenge with people less likely to take short term funded positions. The measures put in place by the Management Board and Chief Officer Team had enabled a stable and supportive workforce. The service had also undertaken work on a Workforce Succession and Development Plan which would ensure that staff were supported, trained and undertook development opportunities. All Youth Justice Services in Wales had experienced changes in Governance, Oversight and Leadership together with the requirement to report on key performance indicators, which came into force in April 2023. Previously the service had requested a peer review around management and governance from the Youth Justice Sector Improvement Partnership. This supported the service by remaining strong to deliver the services to children and young people in advance of a HMRP inspection within the next 12 months.

In response to comments made by Councillor Dave Mackie around the funding for this service the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) outlined the frustrations around the funding situation and meant that the service was unable to plan strategically for a very vulnerable cohort of young people. Recruitment into that service was challenging which was why the Chief Executive and the Chief Officer Team had made the decision to appoint permanent posts on a risk basis for these specialist roles. The Chief Executive, as the Chair of the Management Board, had written to the Youth Justice Board stating how unacceptable it was at this point in the financial year that it was still now known what the core funding allocation was.

The Chair thanked the Senior Manager and his team for the detailed Plan and was glad that they embraced constructive reviews from colleagues which improved overall services within the constraints of the budget. She felt that they were at the top of their game.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved by Councillor Dave Mackie and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey.

<u>RESOLVED</u>

That the strategic and operational priorities in the Youth Justice Plan be noted.

16. **<u>COUNCIL PLAN 2022-23 YEAR-END PERFORMANCE</u>**

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) presented the report which provided a summary of the Council Plan priorities for year-end for the Education & Youth Portfolio. It was highlighted that 77% of activities were making good progress with 62% of the performance indicators having met or exceeded their targets for the year. Section 1.04 of the report provided a summary of the overall progress ratings against activities at year end.

The report provided details on the small percentage of Red activities, with the Chief Officer explaining that the Council reporting year did not align with the School Academic year and that the main focus in schools this year had been on the whole school approach to emotional well-being and baseline audits which were referred to earlier in the meeting. Schools were on track in completing their baseline audits and creating their action plans which would be reflected in the Q1 report. Referring to Section 1.08 of the report the Chief Officer provided detailed information on the sub priorities for fixed term exclusions and digital learning sessions provided in Welsh.

In response to Councillor Dave Mackie's comment on the lack of information from Open University Wales, the Chief Officer clarified that this information sat with Aura as it was one of their targets. She agreed to feed this back to them. The Chair asked that a request be made for a representative from Aura attend a future Committee meeting to provide background to their section of the report.

Responding to the question from Councillor Mackie on the Plas Derwen Pupil Referral Unit and increase in pupil exclusions, the Chief Officer said the portfolio had the support of the Inclusion Team but that part of the Strategy had been to use the expertise of the Pupil Referral Unit as these were highly skilled individuals who dealt with children with challenging behaviours. The Chief Officer provided an overview of the challenges faced around staffing and the focus to re-establish their senior leadership team and address the recommendations of the Estyn Inspection. In light of this the Secondary Head Teachers fully understood the situation and were sympathetic.

The Chief Officer advised that Plas Derwen was not the only source available to schools as there were opportunities for the ongoing development of their own staff in terms of behaviour management through the professional development and learning funding. Following the pandemic and the challenges that pupils were facing returning to school, many staff felt the strategies were in place prior to the pandemic were no longer successful. The whole school approach to emotional health and well-being was important as a supportive strand of the audits and plans that the schools were putting in place to support these issues.

In response to questions from Councillor Gladys Healey on Elective Home Education and the team supporting this, the Chief Officer confirmed that a report had been presented to Committee on Elective Home Education. The team comprised of a dedicated Officer who focused on this work with the support of a whole team of Educational Social Workers and Inclusion Social Workers. She reassured Members that the portfolio was fulfilling its statutory responsibilities in that oversight of children whose parents had taken the decision to home educate. There had been an increase with more parents taking that decision across the different year groups with some year groups more prevalent than others. Fixed Penalty Notices were issued when the school had exhausted all other opportunities for intervention to encourage parents to send their children to school. This was supported by the Community Focused Schools promoted and supported by Welsh Government (WG). It was around understanding the barriers and challenges that children faced in accessing their education and providing that support to families to assist them with these challenging issues.

The Chair referred to the letter sent to Jeremy Miles raising the concerns of the Committee which had been circulated to Members.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved by Councillor Carolyn Preece and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED

(a)   That the Committee support the levels of progress and have confidence in the achievement of priorities as detailed within the Council Plan 2022/23;

(b)   That the Committee support overall performance against Council Plan 2022/23 performance indicators/measures; and

(c)   That the Committee was assured by explanations given for those areas of underperformance.

17.   **SCHOOL MEALS SERVICE**

In presenting the report Mr Steve Jones, Managing Director of NEWydd Catering and Cleaning explained that the report centred around universal free school meals. Although this was a positive step by Welsh Government (WG), as a business it had highlighted certain risks as it made the company more of a target for private sector companies. Schools made these decisions themselves, so it was NEWydd's priority to provide a good service to retain the business.

The roll out of free school meals commenced in September 2022 with reception aged pupils and then with years 1 and 2 after Easter 2023. The service was on target to roll out to years 3 and 4 in September 2023 with years 5 and 6 eligible from April 2024. A significant amount of work had been undertaken in schools which included improvements to infrastructure, equipment, resources and ensuring processes were in place. A cross party project group was established to oversee this which included the Managing Director representing NEWydd and colleagues from across the Council to ensure targets were met. The Group also represented the Council nationally at meetings led by WG or the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to discuss finance and catering implementation.

Members were referred to section 2 of the report which included detail on the improvements to infrastructure with information provided on the central kitchen created 2 years ago and the work undertaken following the roll out with more school meals provided. All meals were fully compliant with the WG Healthy Eating in Schools Regulations with work underway to reintroduce, for example, more home cooked recipes and on-site baking similar to what was provided before the pandemic. Information on the pilot partnership with Well Fed was given with the results due shortly.

In relation to resources, it was confirmed that the revenue funding from WG was based on a meal unit rate of £2.90 per meal with many Councils including Flintshire reporting that this did not cover the cost of delivery. A Group had been established to review the actual cost of a school meal including all costs not just the food with the Managing Director representing the Council at a meeting on the 17 July. Referring to Capital Funding WG had awarded the authority £3m of capital funding which had enabled improvements to infrastructure, improvements to gas and electricity supplies into kitchens, ventilation works and the purchase of equipment. It had also enabled increased cooking capacity within the kitchens, and he thanked the schools for their support whilst this work was undertaken. There were a small number of schools waiting

for the infrastructure works to begin and a schedule of works was planned with the Council's property team during the summer term to ensure completion by September. An overview of the improved seating arrangements, lighting and crockery was given.

Referring to risks the Managing Director said it was important that families who were eligible for free school meals applied and he outlined how this was signposted across the council. Consultation continued with parents and schools with another survey taking place in September to ensure any issues at a school level were fed back. It was currently successful with uptake rates at 70% of those eligible aligning with WG targets but the service wanted to improve this figure to reach as many pupils as possible.

In response to a question from Councillor Dave Mackie on the energy efficiency of the new electric cookers, the Managing Director was not aware that they were more costly to use. Gas equipment was being replaced with Electric equipment as this helped with ventilation as the rules for gas equipment were more stringent. Some of the Capital funding had been used in schools to increase energy efficiency within the school.

In response to questions on menu choices and funding, the Managing Director advised that there was a large choice of meals but if the quality of the main offer was increased, the hot meat and vegetarian main hot offer choice going alongside this would be reduced. Currently the two main offers provided plus a jacket potato with various fillings, pasta pot with various fillings and sandwiches with various fillings. It was proposed to reduce this to meet or come within the funding envelope available which would reduce this to four items, the two main hot choices and pasta or jacket potato and sandwiches. He said that the most nutritious meal that a child could have every day was a school meal and if the hot offer was taken every day, then this was guaranteed to be the most nutritious.

From September all schools would be provided with fresh salad bars to support every meal with fresh fruit and yoghurt bars for dessert. This had been trialled recently in some schools and the children really enjoyed it, especially as they could serve themselves with many children trying foods they had not tried before.

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) acknowledged that younger children may not be as confident to try a different range of foods. The menus were published via social media accounts, so children and families were able to look at the choices. This was a fantastic opportunity funded through the Co-operation Agreement and the Managing Director was representing the Council on the group looking at finance and hopefully WG would be in a position to increase the funding per meal to accommodate the rising costs. The emphasis was on quality to ensure children had a really healthy meal and she asked that Members support the portfolio by encouraging families in their wards to apply for the free school meals.

In response to the comments made by Councillor Andrew Parkhurst around the quality of school meals, the Managing Director agreed that a sandwich would not be as nutritious as the hot offer. He agreed with the comments on processed cheese and white bread and said improving the sandwich offer was being considered. The menu was constantly being improved especially with the re-introduction of home baking in the kitchens.

In response to the comment made by Councillor Parkhurst concerning the seating at schools, the Managing Director said that this had been well received in schools who had been given a choice of various options. They were fixed with backless chairs, but the balance was that they folded into a small unit which could be moved out the way as the halls in schools were used for other activities within the school.

In response to the comment made by Councillor Parkhurst regarding waste and the use of single use plastics, the Managing Director said it was difficult to measure waste. He said waste was measured from the kitchens and production daily which was kept to a minimum. Once it had left the counter it was difficult to measure, and the service was criticised during Covid with regards to the use of disposables, but these had to be used because of the way the meals were served in classrooms. There had been a massive reduction in single use plastics with very few used in the catering service at present and once past October they would not be able to be used at all. Everyone was encouraged to take a plate, knife, and fork which was the most environmentally friendly way to serve a meal. Sandwiches were served in cardboard and all supplier's ensured waste was kept to at a minimum.

Councillor Carolyn Preece spoke as a school governor and said the chairs were an excellent use of space with the children and staff liking them as they were easy to fold up and move out of the way. Referring to nutrition she confirmed that she attended the Well-Fed sampling with the pupils who really enjoyed the samples they tried, and they looked very nutritious.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved by Councillor Carolyn Preece and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED

That the Committee acknowledges the work undertaken by NEWydd, officers and schools to deliver the Welsh Government's strategy for the provision of Universal Free School Meals.

18. **SCHOOL IT**

The IT Infrastructure Services Manager outlined the work undertaken by his team in Schools with regards to IT support and infrastructure. The Briefing Note contained information on the national infrastructure challenges and the Public Sector Broadband Aggregation Network (PSBA) which provided internet access to all schools and the Council. Background information on the Briefing Note in terms of how the services were delivered and recent infrastructure challenges were highlighted together with the mitigations undertaken.

Councillor Bill Crease thanked the Infrastructure Services Manager for the Briefing Note. He reported on a recent visit to a school where he was a school governor and the consistent issues faced by staff which was accessing the system using the WiFi service within the school. This was throughout the school, and he felt it was either the infrastructure within the school or that the set up of the devices accessing the service

needing checking. The Infrastructure Services Manager agreed to speak to Councillor Crease outside of the meeting to obtain more detail and speak to the school. All schools had received significant investment in IT infrastructure, wireless and end use devices with millions spent across Wales. He was more than happy to pick this up to establish why the school was affected in this way.

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) asked the IT Infrastructure Services Manager if the school should have escalated this through the schools IT Technician arrangements. The IT Infrastructure Services Manager confirmed that that was correct but he wanted to investigate it further. Councillor Crease thanked the Service Manager and said the amount of equipment in the school was fabulous with the main difficulty getting the device onto the system.

RESOLVED

That the update be noted.

19. **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 3.48 pm)

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Chair

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EDUCATION YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday 14th September, 2023
Report Subject	Forward Work Programme and Action Tracking
Report Author	Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview & Scrutiny presents a unique opportunity for Members to determine the Forward Work programme of the Committee of which they are Members. By reviewing and prioritising the Forward Work Programme Members are able to ensure it is Member-led and includes the right issues. A copy of the Forward Work Programme is attached at Appendix 1 for Members' consideration which has been updated following the last meeting.

The Committee is asked to consider, and amend where necessary, the Forward Work Programme for the Education Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The report also shows actions arising from previous meetings of the Education Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the progress made in completing them. Any outstanding actions will be continued to be reported to the Committee as shown in Appendix 2.

	RECOMMENDATION
1	That the Committee considers the draft Forward Work Programme and approve/amend as necessary.
2	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.
3	That the Committee notes the progress made in completing the outstanding actions.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING
1.01	Items feed into a Committee's Forward Work Programme from a number of sources. Members can suggest topics for review by Overview & Scrutiny Committees, members of the public can suggest topics, items can be referred by the Cabinet for consultation purposes, or by County Council or Chief Officers. Other possible items are identified from the Cabinet Work Programme and the Improvement Plan.
1.02	In identifying topics for future consideration, it is useful for a 'test of significance' to be applied. This can be achieved by asking a range of questions as follows: 1. Will the review contribute to the Council's priorities and/or objectives? 2. Is it an area of major change or risk? 3. Are there issues of concern in performance? 4. Is there new Government guidance of legislation? 5. Is it prompted by the work carried out by Regulators/Internal Audit? 6. Is the issue of Public or Member concern?
1.03	In previous meetings, requests for information, reports or actions have been made. These have been summarised as action points. Following a meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee in July 2018, it was recognised that there was a need to formalise such reporting back to Overview & Scrutiny Committees, as 'Matters Arising' was not an item which can feature on an agenda.
1.04	It was suggested that the 'Action tracking' approach be trialled for the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Following a successful trial, it was agreed to extend the approach to all Overview & Scrutiny Committees.
1.05	The Action Tracking details including an update on progress is attached at Appendix 2.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	None as a result of this report.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	In some cases, action owners have been contacted to provide an update on their actions.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	None as a result of this report.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 – Draft Forward Work Programme. Appendix 2 – Action Tracking for the Education Youth & Culture OSC.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Minutes of previous meetings of the Committee as identified in Appendix 2. **Contact Officer:** Ceri Shotton Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator **Telephone:** 01352 702305 **E-mail:** ceri.shotton@flintshire.gov.uk

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	**Improvement Plan:** the document which sets out the annual priorities of the Council. It is a requirement of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 to set Improvement Objectives and publish an Improvement Plan.

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CURRENT FWP

Date of meeting	Subject	Purpose of Report	Scrutiny Focus	Responsible / Contact Officer
Thursday 19th October, 2023 **2.00pm**	**Summer Play Scheme**	Update on Summer play scheme	Assurance Monitoring	Chief Officer (Education & Youth), and Senior Manager Youth Services
	Consultation on Member Role Descriptions	To consult Members on the draft role descriptions as provided in the revised draft Model Constitution.	Consultation	Democratic Services Manager
Thursday 30th November, 2023 **2.00pm**	**Council Plan 2023-24 Mid-Year Performance Reporting**	To review the levels of progress in the achievement of activities and performance levels identified in the Council Plan.	Assurance Monitoring	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
	Feedback from Youth Justice Service Peer review	To Provide Members with an overview of the outcomes from the recent peer review	Assurance Monitoring	Chief Officer (Education & Youth), and Senior Manager Youth Justice Service
	Sustainable Learning Communities update	To update Members on the progress made with the Wales Government's sustainable learning communities programme	Assurance Monitoring	Chief Officer (Education & Youth), and Senior Manager School Place Planning & Provision
Thursday 1st February, 2024 **2.00pm**				

Thursday 21st March, 2024 **2.00pm**	**Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan**	To update on how the Council is meeting the requirements of the Welsh Government Anti-racist Wales Action Plan in line with the development of the new Curriculum for Wales.	Assurance Monitoring	Senior Manager for School Improvement
Thursday 30th May, 2024 **2.00pm**	**Attendance and Exclusions**	To provide Members with an overview of school attendance and exclusions and the role of the Portfolio's support services in this area.	Assurance Monitoring	Chief Officer (Education & Youth), and Senior Manager Inclusion Services
Thursday 27th June, 2024 **Joint meeting with S&HC OSC - 2.00pm**	**Safeguarding in Education including Internet Safety and Social Media**	To provide an update on the discharge of statutory safeguarding duties in schools and the Education portfolio. To include information on Relationship and Sexual Education and how this was contributing to reducing harm.	Assurance Monitoring	Chief Officer (Education & Youth) and Healthy Schools Practitioner
	Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018	To outline the approach to the identification and commissioning of post 16 education for Flintshire young people.	Assurance Monitoring	Senior Manager – Inclusion & Progression
	Children Looked After in Flintshire	To provide an update on the provision for Looked After Children. And to provide an update on the challenges, positive working and how young people were supported through the pilot to provide funding directly to looked	Assurance Monitoring	Senior Manager – Inclusion & Progression

		after children leaving care.		
	Social Media and Internet Safety	To provide Members with an update on the Portfolio's Social Media and Internet Safety policy and provision.	Assurance Monitoring	Learning Adviser - Health, Well-being and Safeguarding
Thursday 11th July, 2024 **2.0pm**	**Council Plan 2023-24 Year-End Performance**	To review the levels of progress in the achievement of activities and performance levels identified in the Council Plan.	Assurance Monitoring	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)

INFORMATION REPORTS/BRIEFING PAPERS TO BE CIRCULATED TO THE COMMITTEE

Item	Purpose of information report	Month
Health & Safety in Schools	Information report on accidents during the academic year and the actions taken to support schools in achieving healthy and safe environment.	December
Parking Outside Schools	To provide information from the Highways Team on legislation around parking outside schools and the mechanism in place for joint working with the Police and Schools.	-
Policies for dealing with bullying in schools	To provide information on School Policies for dealing with instances of bullying.	-

Items to be scheduled

- Recycling School Uniforms – **Referred to the Committee from the Environment & Economy OSC.**

- Tackling the Impact of Inequality on Education Outcomes – to include information on work being undertaken linking with colleagues across North Wales and the regional skills board partnership to better understand the labour market, job opportunities and career aspirations – **suggested at May and July 2023 meeting.**

- Tackling the Impact of Inequality on Education Outcomes – specific report around the 'Ask Ceri' resource and what impact this was having following its re-launch – **suggested at May 2023 meeting.**

- Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) workshop for Members to be held in either October or November 2023

- Healthy Schools Scheme and Healthy & Sustainable Pre-School Scheme (HSPSS) – That the Committee be advised / consulted on the aims & objectives when the scheme is relaunched – **suggested at July 2023 meeting**

REGULAR ITEMS

Month	Item	Purpose of Report	Responsible / Contact Officer
February/ March	**School Modernisation**	To update Members on the progress made with School Modernisation.	Senior Manager School Planning & Provision
May	**Attendance & Exclusions**	To provide Members with an overview of school attendance and exclusions and the role of the Portfolio's support services in this area.	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
September	**Self-evaluation on education services & learner outcomes**	To update Members on overall service performance including Learner Outcomes.	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
June	**Additional Learning Needs**	To update members on the implementation of national ALN reforms in schools and the role of the Portfolio's support services in this area.	Senior Manager – Inclusion & Progression
September	**Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service (GwE)**	To receive an update on progress with the development of the regional school effectiveness and improvement service, to include a presentation from the Chief Officer of GwE.	Chief Officer (Education & Youth) & GwE Senior Officers

Month	Item	Purpose of Report	Responsible / Contact Officer
September	**School Balances**	To provide the Committee with details of the closing balances held by Flintshire schools at the end of the financial year.	Finance Manager
Annually	**Learning from the School Performance Monitoring Group (SPMG) -**	To receive the annual report on progress and learning from the SPMG.	Senior Manager – School Improvement;
Annually	**Social Media & Internet Safety - now part of Safeguarding Report to the Joint Scrutiny Committee**	To receive an annual report assurance/monitoring.	Healthy Schools Practictioner

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ACTION TRACKING FOR THE EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting Date	Agenda item	Action Required	Action Officer(s)	Action taken	Timescale
23.03.2023	5. School Parking	In line with recommendation (c), that Members of the Education, Youth & Culture OSC and Environment & Economy OSC be contacted to seek nominations to sit on the Task & Finish Group.	Ceri Shotton	Date for first meeting set for 19th September. E-mail sent to information Members of the Group.	Completed.
11.05.2023	7. Attendance & Exclusions	Cllr Gladys Healey suggested that the Home-Schooling Officer be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to outline the work and support being provided.	Claire Homard / Ceri Shotton	To be invited as part of the future Attendance & Exclusion report to the Committee.	Ongoing.
29.06.2023	4. Provision for Children who are Looked After (CLA/LAC)	Cllr Hilary McGuill sought assurance that the 4 children who had left school and did not transfer to education, employment or training (NEET) were being supported. Jeanette Rock agreed to provide information on the 4 children following the meeting.	Jeanette Rock	Information e-mailed to the Education, Youth & Culture and Social & Health Care OSC Committee Members on 08.09.2023.	Completed.
13.07.2023	4. Forward Work Programme and Action Tracking	In response to a question from Cllr Andrew Parkhurst regarding the work of the Regional Skills Partnership Board, the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) agreed to speak to the Facilitator to ensure a report was included in the Forward Work Programme for a future meeting.	Ceri Shotton	Item added to FWP under 'items to be scheduled'.	Completed.

13.07.2023	4. Forward Work Programme and Action Tracking	Include the MTFS Workshop in the Autumn – either October or November.		Item added to FWP under 'items to be scheduled'.	Completed.
13.07.2023	6. Healthy Schools Scheme and Healthy & Sustainable Pre-School Scheme (HSPSS)	That the Committee be advised / consulted on the aims & objectives when the scheme is relaunched.	Ceri Shotton	Item added to FWP under 'items to be scheduled'.	Completed.
13.07.2023	8. Council Plan 2022-23 Year-End Performance	It was asked that an Aura representative be present at the meeting when referenced in any reports in order to answer questions.	Ceri Shotton	Feedback provided to the Performance Team to request a representative of Aura attend future meetings when considering performance reports.	Completed.
13.07.2023	9. School Meals Service	Steve Jones to check whether the new equipment was more expensive – specifically in relation to electricity.	Steve Jones	Information circulated to Committee Members on 08.09.2023.	Completed.

Sir y Fflint Flintshire CYNGOR COUNTY COUNCIL

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	

Date of Meeting	Thursday 14th September 2023
Report Subject	Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service (GwE) Annual Report 2022-2023
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education and Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The GwE Report provides a detailed overview for members of the work of the Regional School Improvement Service with Flintshire schools during the academic year 2022 -2023.

The report identifies that there is a strong relationship between Flintshire County Council and the Regional School Effectiveness Service (GwE). There are robust procedures in place for setting a direction and holding the regional service to account. The specific roles of the Local Authority and the regional school improvement service in school improvement are explicit and clear to all stakeholders and they are effectively held to account by local scrutiny procedures.

Flintshire LA with the support and advice of GwE knows its schools and settings well and provides a robust and appropriate challenge as well as effective support and intervention for them. There are strategies, policies and processes for school improvement that are clear to all stakeholders and which shape and steer the delivery of school improvement activity.

The report also details how the Local Authority responds promptly and firmly to schools causing concern. There are specific examples in the Local Authority's schools where intensifying the challenge and support alongside robust and timely action have directly resulted in positive changes. There is strong evidence that the

Local Authority's processes and actions to support schools causing concern is impacting on the quality of leadership and pedagogy and leading to improved standards in those schools identified.

RECOMMENDATIONS	
1	The Education, Youth and Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee is asked to accept the Report from GwE and note the positive impact of the regional service in supporting Flintshire schools, maintaining the focus on effective and successful schools.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE GWE REPORT 2022-2023
1.01	The content of the report captures progress against four key areas: Key Area 1 – Improving Leadership Key Area 2 – Improving Teaching and Learning Key Area 3 – Curriculum and Provision Key Area 4 – Learner Progress and Standards There are two appendices within the report: Appendix 1 is a concise summary of the four key areas for secondary schools; Appendix 2 is a concise summary of the four key areas for primary schools.
1.02	Numbers – quantities and proportions In order to be consistent, the report uses the same terms as Estyn to describe proportions: - nearly all = with very few exceptions - most = 90% or more - many = 70% or more - a majority = over 60% - a minority = below 40% - few = below 20%
1.03	Key Area 1 – Improving Leadership In most of the Local Authority's schools, the senior leadership is strong. The Local Authority and GwE provide a rich array of professional learning to develop leadership at every level, together with targeted and bespoke

	support for schools as required, and especially for those schools causing concern. Moreover, there are robust arrangements in place in the Local Authority where school leaders collaborate to support one another in primary clusters and secondary alliances and take increasing ownership and accountability for one another's improvement journey.
1.04	**Key Area 2 – Improving Teaching and Learning** The quality of teaching is generally strong across most schools in all sectors and purposeful action is taken to address areas of concern and to reduce in-school variance. The Local Authority, in partnership with GwE, has been taking positive steps to support leaders and teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning prior, during and after the Covid-19 period. From the beginning of lockdown, the Local Authority and GwE were proactive in their support for schools. A wide range of quality materials and models for distance and blended learning have been provided through digital platforms such as 'Google Classroom' and GwE Support Centre. The work has drawn on the findings of research into effective international practices. Almost all headteachers have appreciated the input of the Supporting Improvement Advisers (SIAs) and Local Authority officers in providing guidance and support for schools and clusters to develop their provision. Almost all headteachers noted that facilitating cluster meetings has been instrumental in sharing ideas and good practice for developing their distance and blended learning provision. It was also noted that these meetings have had a positive impact on their mental health and well-being.
1.05	**Key Area 3 – Curriculum and Provision** The regional service has effectively supported leaders in preparation for The Reform Journey and Curriculum for Wales and has been flexible in its provision in order to meet schools' various needs during the pandemic. Due to effective collaboration and engagement between the LA, GwE and schools: • all schools are implementing plans to deliver against the four purposes of the new curriculum. • all schools are working to develop a balanced curriculum offer to meet the needs of their learners including the more able. • all clusters are implementing transition plans. • all schools are actively engaging in peer collaboration within and across sectors.
1.06	Key Area 4 – Learner Progress and Standards

	The increased focus on supporting schools to improve the quality and consistency of leadership and pedagogy has led to improved standards across nearly all primary and secondary schools. Pace of improvement needs further acceleration in a minority of primary schools and in a few secondary schools. Impact of teaching and provision on pupils' progress continues to be a priority in all secondary schools.
1.07	Support and challenge for schools causing concern Flintshire Local Authority responds promptly and firmly where there are schools causing concern. There are specific examples where intensifying the challenge and support alongside robust and prompt action have directly resulted in improvements. There is strong evidence that the Local Authority's actions to support schools causing concern is effective.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	There are no financial implications arising from this report. GwE will operate within the current financial resources.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	There are no specific risks arising from this report and subsequent actions. GwE maintains its own risk register to identify and manage risks on a local, regional and national level which is regularly updated and reported upon to the Management Board and the Joint Committee. The Management Board comprising of GwE senior managers and the six North Wales Chief Education Officers, monitors matters of governance continuously. GwE has procedures in place to ensure the Joint Committee meetings, where the six North Wales Cabinet Members for Education have governance oversight and decision-making powers, supported by the host authority Gwynedd, are conducted effectively and the service is held appropriately to account. The Council's Education Portfolio has a detailed risk assessment which outlines key risks related to the delivery of education services and method statements which describe how these risks are managed. These are regularly reported to the Education, Youth and Culture Overview Scrutiny Committee.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	Regular discussions are held with GwE Management Board which comprises of the Senior Management Team of GwE and the six Chief Education Officers of the North Wales authorities. GwE use a range of models and surveys to consider impact, based on national and international research, as well as working collaboratively with strategic Higher Education Institutes (HEI). GwE is working closely with Bangor University on the 'Collaborative Institute for Education Research, Evidence and Impact' (CIEREI) Project.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	**Document 1:** GwE Scrutiny Report for Flintshire 2022-2023

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	**Cwricwlwm i Gymru / Curriculum for Wales** https://hwb.gov.wales/cwricwlwm-i-gymru/ https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	**Contact Officer:** Arwyn Thomas, GwE Managing Director **Telephone:** 01492 806115 **E-mail:** ArwynThomas@gwegogledd.cymru **Contact Officer:** Vicky Barlow, Senior Manager for School Improvement **Telephone:** 01352 704019 **E-mail:** vicky.barlow@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	**GwE** –is the North Wales regional school improvement service working alongside and on behalf of the six North Wales local authorities.

GwE Management Board - comprising of GwE senior managers and the six North Wales Chief Education Officers. The Board monitors matters of governance continuously.

SIA – Supporting Improvement Adviser for GwE. Each school has an allocated SIA.

Cymraeg 2050 – Welsh Language Strategy; long-term approach to achieving a million Welsh speakers by 2050

FLINTSHIRE SCRUTINY REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2023

www.gwegogledd.cymru   @GwEGogleddCymru

FLINTSHIRE LOCAL AUTHORITY SCRUTINY REPORT SEPTEMBER 2023

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

This year's Annual Progress Report is bespoke to Flintshire.

A strong relationship exists between Flintshire County Council and the Regional School Effectiveness Service (GwE). There are robust procedures in place for setting a direction and holding the regional service to account. The specific roles of the Local Authority and the regional school improvement service in school improvement are explicit and clear to all stakeholders and they are effectively held to account by local scrutiny procedures.

The regional service evaluates its work regularly and uses quantitative and qualitative data and information effectively to ensure that areas for improvement are identified swiftly and are firmly addressed via detailed business planning. There is a clear and effective process to ensure that the regional service meets the Local Authority's corporate priorities and targets.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Flintshire LA with the support and advice of GwE knows its schools and settings well and provides a robust and appropriate challenge as well as effective support and intervention for them. There are strategies, policies and processes for school improvement that are clear to all stakeholders and which shape and steer the delivery of school improvement activity.

The Local Authority responds promptly and firmly to schools causing concern. There are specific examples in the Local Authority's schools where intensifying the challenge and support alongside robust and timely action have directly resulted in positive changes. There is strong evidence that the Local Authority's processes and actions to support schools causing concern is impacting on the quality of leadership and pedagogy and leading to improved standards in those schools identified.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that even in the most challenging of circumstances positive change is possible. During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools across the Local Authority delivered meaningful teaching and learning experiences through a creative blended learning approach. The pandemic undoubtedly led to an increased focus on well-being and a significant investment in teaching and learning.

In most of the Local Authority's schools, the senior leadership is strong. The Local Authority and GwE provide a rich array of professional learning to develop leadership at every level, together with targeted and bespoke support for schools as required, and especially for those schools causing concern. Moreover, there are robust arrangements in place in the Local Authority where school leaders collaborate to support one another in primary clusters and secondary alliances and take increasing ownership and accountability for one another's improvement journey.

The quality of teaching is generally good across most schools in all sectors and purposeful action is taken to address areas of concern and to reduce in-school variance. The Local Authority, in partnership with GwE, has been taking positive steps to support leaders and teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning prior, during and after the Covid-19 period.

The increased focus on supporting schools to improve the quality and consistency of leadership and pedagogy has led to improved standards across the majority of secondary schools. Pace of improvement needs further acceleration in a few secondary schools. All secondary schools are making more intelligent use of data and teaching, learning and

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assessment information to evaluate standards and to identify priorities for further improvement but it is recognised that these processes require further strengthening to ensure a greater focus on pupil progress in some schools. Secondary schools are also delivering tracking and intervention programmes to address identified underperformance and in-school variance. In a few schools, these approaches need to be further strengthened and honed.

Nearly all schools in Flintshire are on track to realise the steps outlined in the 'Journey to 2022' (Curriculum for Wales) document. There is specific support in place for the very few schools not on track and significant progress is being made. Nearly all secondary schools are currently on track in delivering the new curriculum for Years 7 and 8 from September 2023.

The following areas have been identified as key priorities for further development and improvement:

- continue to strengthen leadership at all levels in the secondary sector with specific focus on further improving self-evaluation and improvement planning processes.
- further develop the capacity of senior and middle leaders to effectively lead on teaching and learning.
- further strengthen accountability processes across schools to ensure robust and timely interventions to address underperformance.
- ensure that all secondary leaders are actively engaged in peer collaboration and review.
- strengthen systems for evaluating impact of improvement strategies on standards and pupil progress.
- further strengthen the quality of teaching and assessment to reduce variance both within and across schools.
- further strengthen the quality of provision for development of learners' skills.
- ensure all secondary schools are implementing robust approaches to supporting learners who have additional learning needs.
- further develop tracking and intervention programmes to address identified underperformance and in-school variance and especially in relation to vulnerable learners.
- ensure that all secondary schools successfully deliver the new curriculum for Years 7 and 8 from September 2023.
- ensure schools are providing equity to all learners and have an inclusive learning environment to support those who are vulnerable to learning.
- further develop provision in secondary schools to ensure a meaningful and purposeful offer for the ability range in KS4.
- ensure all primary/secondary clusters are implementing effective transition plans.
- ensure that the secondary school in statutory category is demonstrating an increased pace of improvements against recommendations from the inspection

The content of the report captures progress against four key areas in addition to identifying the net steps on the improvement trajectory:

Key Area 1 – Improving Leadership

Key Area 2 – Improving Teaching and Learning

Key Area 3 – Curriculum and Provision

Key Area 4 – Learner Progress and Standards

There are two appendices to this report: Appendix 1 is a concise summary of the four key areas for secondary schools; Appendix 2 is a concise summary of the four key areas for primary schools.

IMPROVING LEADERSHIP

Summary of main actions, engagement and impact

Senior leadership in Flintshire schools is generally strong. Due to the ongoing focus on support and guidance for leadership:

- nearly all schools are taking action to further strengthen leadership within their school with specific focus on further honing and improving evaluation and improvement planning at all levels.
- most schools are prioritising guidance and support to further develop the capacity of senior and middle leaders to effectively lead and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning.
- there is an increase in the number of leaders accessing high quality training and leadership development programmes.
- an increasing number of schools have senior leaders who are trained as peer reviewers and improvement facilitators and are actively engaging in peer review activities.

The Local Authority and GwE provide a rich array of professional learning to develop leadership at every level, together with targeted and bespoke support for schools as required, and especially for those schools causing concern. Moreover, there are arrangements in place where school leaders collaborate to support one another in primary clusters and secondary alliances, taking increasing ownership and accountability for one another's improvement journey.

The Local Authority and GwE have effective procedures to support schools with their self-evaluation and planning for improvement. Schools are firmly challenged on the quality and veracity of their self-evaluation processes and Supporting Improvement Advisers are actively engaged in evaluation activities within schools such as scrutiny of work, lesson observations and learning walks and harvesting pupil voice.

Almost all schools managed to continue to evaluate the quality of their provision throughout the Covid-19 period using a variety of useful sources of information and evidence, including regular discussions with other schools and GwE Link Advisers. Most schools gathered the views of stakeholders effectively via questionnaires for pupils and parents, telephone calls or conversations with individuals. Based on these findings, most have adapted and improved their provision considerably. Since summer 2022 all schools have put in place actions to ensure that evaluation activities were strengthened post Covid-19 and in response to the expectations of the new School Improvement Guidance.

A substantial number of Flintshire Local Authority practitioners have engaged in the National Leadership Programmes for professional development. This includes middle leaders, senior leaders, new head teachers and experienced head teachers. Effective collaboration takes place between the Local Authority and GwE to support the development of leaders across the 'Leadership Pathway'. Information regarding the effectiveness of the programmes is regularly communicated via termly Regional Leadership Group meetings. This collaboration and communication ensure that the Local Authority can identify developmental needs and target further support, if necessary, e.g., bespoke professional learning for middle leaders in secondary schools.

All leadership programmes were adapted for virtual delivery. Teachers in Flintshire demonstrated a noble commitment to develop their practice and leadership skills during the Covid-19 period. Despite all additional challenges, 67 practitioners participated in the leadership programmes during 2021-22 whilst a further 60 individuals engaged in the programmes for 2022-23.

Over the last four years, 21 practitioners have met the requirements for the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) qualification. Effective collaboration takes place between the Local Authority and GwE to support new head teachers and acting headteachers. The programme consists of a rich array of regular training throughout the educational year in order to equip headteachers to be able to successfully undertake their work e.g., briefing sessions from local authority officers with responsibility for Finance, Human Resources, Safeguarding, Health and Safety. All new headteachers are allocated a Leadership Coach to provide additional support and guidance on leadership and management issues. This means that new heads are provided with timely and appropriate support from experienced and accomplished school leaders to further support the development of their leadership skills. Twenty-three headteachers have followed the programme since it started in 2018 including 7 this year.

Thirty-seven school leaders, as well as nearly all GwE staff supporting schools in Flintshire, have followed the national programme for coaching and mentoring. Feedback was received noting that the programme had a positive impact on individuals in schools and also on the work of the regional service in supporting schools and clusters.

An inclusive development and training programme for governors is available, partly produced through consultation and engagement with governors in order for them to identify their own developmental needs. Feedback from governors on the programme has been very positive. The regional service has a diverse provision of training to enrich that of the Authority.

A rich array of professional development is provided for teaching assistants through the national programmes, i.e., the Teaching Assistants Learning Pathway [TALP]. This includes 'Induction', 'Practising Assistants' and the 'Aspiring HLTAs' programme, leading up to HLTA status assessment. In the same manner as the Leadership programme for teachers, these encourage individuals to become reflective practitioners who evaluate their practice against the 'Professional Standards for Assisting Teaching'.

All TALP programmes have been adapted for virtual delivery, a change that has been very well-received by Flintshire teaching assistants. The 'Induction' programme was put in the form of an online playlist and during 2020-21 and 2021-22, 26 assistants completed this programme. This is 17% of the teaching assistants completing the programme across the region - numbers are the same as the previous two years. The Induction programme will continue to be delivered in this format.

The 'Practising Assistants' programme was also adapted during 2021-22 for virtual delivery. Towards the end of 2021-22 the Practising programme gradually returned to face-to-face delivery (as the situation allowed). This was welcomed by teaching assistants and facilitators alike. The Practising programme is available regionally or can be delivered to a cluster of schools. Three Flintshire schools in total have hosted the Practising programme.

A new national Aspiring Higher Level Teaching Assistant [HLTA] programme was created in 2020 which has now been running over four cycles, with 38 teaching assistants from Flintshire Local Authority participating. Upon completion of the new Aspiring HLTA programme, and meeting literacy and numeracy qualification requirements, teaching assistants can apply for HLTA status assessment. Over the last four years, 44 teaching assistants have received HLTA status. These numbers are significant.

Effective collaboration at a cluster level in the primary is a strength in the Local Authority. All Supporting Improvement Advisers working as Link Advisers with the primary schools are experienced and have been supporting specific clusters for an extended period. This means that the regional service and education service now have a thorough knowledge of the

strengths and needs of specific schools and clusters/groups of schools. There are numerous examples across the primary catchment areas that show that systems and processes for collaboration are maturing amongst the Authority's schools and as a result there is an increase in the sharing of expertise and best practice. It has also led to a reduced workload in response to the Reform Journey. At best, collaboration involves leaders from all tiers meeting regularly to discuss and share effective practice, collaborating in a structured and directed manner and successfully developing a wide variety of areas such as Curriculum for Wales, pedagogy, Additional Learning Needs, digital and primary-secondary transition. This collaboration has resulted in improving learner experiences and outcomes.

58 primary and secondary schools in 8 catchment areas are committed to the peer review programme through the Schools Partnership Programme. 34 teachers have been trained as peer reviewers and 36 are trained facilitators.

IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING

Summary of main actions, engagement and impact
Due to the increased focus on support and guidance for improving the teaching and learning through engagement in the Shirley Clarke Assessment for Learning [AfL] research programme, through networks for teaching and learning leads, networks for core subject and the work of the 'team around the school' for Schools Causing Concern:
- many schools are demonstrating improvements in specific aspects of pedagogy. However, the pace and scale of improvements require further attention in a few schools.
- nearly all schools are taking appropriate action to further strengthen pedagogy and raise standards.
- high quality targeted subject specific support for pedagogy is improving standards of teaching and learning across many subjects and specifically in English and Mathematics and improving both depth and breadth of understanding.
- nearly all schools have appropriate literacy and numeracy interventions in place and can demonstrate the progress made by groups of pupils.

The quality of teaching is generally strong across most schools in all sectors and purposeful action is taken to address areas of concern and to reduce in-school variance. The Local Authority, in partnership with GwE, has been taking positive steps to support leaders and teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning prior, during and after the Covid-19 period.

Since the beginning of lockdown, the Local Authority and GwE were proactive in their support for schools. A wide range of quality materials and models for distance and blended learning have been provided through digital platforms such as 'Google Classroom' and GwE Support Centre. The work has drawn on the findings of research into effective international practices.

Almost all headteachers have appreciated the input of the Link Supporting Improvement Advisers and Local Authority officers in terms of providing guidance and support for schools and clusters to develop their provision. Almost all headteachers noted that facilitating cluster meetings has been instrumental in sharing ideas and good practice for developing their distance and blended learning provision. It was also noted that these meetings have had a positive impact on their mental health and well-being.

The Local Authority and GwE have also provided a range of high-quality guidance and resources to support schools to improve parental engagement and have worked with Mike Gershon to facilitate parental access to quality materials so that they also can support their children. 'Helping your Child to Learn' (HYCTL) and 'Helping your Teen to Learn' (HYTTL) materials, and the 'Revise with Mike'

resource have been very well-received. The range of revision strategies has also impacted on teachers' classroom floor practices as they prepare learners for end of year examinations.

Schools have been provided with detailed guidance to support their preparations for delivering the new curriculum. The focus on pedagogy and the 12 principles are central to this work. Since September 2021, the service and school representatives have been working effectively with Professor Graham Donaldson, in an attempt to deepen understanding of the Curriculum for Wales Framework. This work has involved promoting successful collaboration meaning that teachers have been able to jointly-plan examples and models to share across schools.

In Flintshire, practitioners from 45 schools are part of the Regional and Local Networks. The Networks share the fruits of their labour with all schools via GwE's Support Centre. Led by network members, effective webinars were held for all school leaders on curriculum design, assessment and progression and planning principles. Schools have noted that the presentations have boosted their confidence to develop their high-level curriculum design and to incorporate the four purposes within their planning. All schools have accessed these workshops either via a live recording or through subsequent discussions with the Link Supporting Improvement Adviser. The regional service has placed a strong focus on developing pedagogy as part of the support for developing the Curriculum for Wales.

The GwE Formative Assessment Action Research project [led by Shirley Clarke] has been one of the pillars of the professional learning programme since November 2017 with 56 Flintshire primary schools, 9 secondary schools and 2 special schools engaging with the project over three tiers. 22 primary schools, 3 secondary schools and 2 special school engaged with the project as part of the tier three cohort. An impact evaluation has identified:

- there has been a positive impact on the quality of teaching in classes, standards of attainment, pupil well-being, attitudes to learning and development as independent learners.
- teachers have deepened understanding of effective pedagogy on the basis of wide and current research, both on a local and international level. They have also become leaders of teaching in their schools and beyond.
- teachers have undertaken action research in their schools and have taken part in professional collaboration and become confident pioneers. Consequently, schools that are a part of the project are developing well as learning organisations.
- there has been a sharper focus on effective pedagogy in cluster collaborations.
- there have been explicit inputs to improving schools' readiness and preparations for delivering the new curriculum e.g., increasing focus on the four purposes, 12 pedagogical principles, schools as learning organisations, professional standards for leaders and teachers, assessment purposes and planning principles.
- schools have made good and effective use of formative assessment principles and strategies for distance and blended learning.
- parents have come to understand more about formative assessment in their efforts to support their children at home e.g., learning powers, learning outcomes, success criteria and verbal feedback.

There has also been a consistent focus on supporting schools to improve the quality of differentiated support across the ability range. Establishing the secondary More Able and Talented [MAT] Coordinators' Network, prior to Covid, is one specific example of this work. Specific guidance and support have been issued to develop better understanding and confidence amongst coordinators to lead on this across schools and to develop their processes and systems for identifying, tracking and supporting this particular group of learners. There was also input to ensure that they were aware of the national developments in this regard. As a group, they have collaborated to ensure a shared understanding and how

to ensure an appropriate level of challenge and how to promote recall and revision strategies. Since the pandemic, this group has become part of the Teaching and Learning Leaders group.

A range of networks and forums are operational to support leaders in the secondary sector, at every level, to be able to lead on pedagogy with increased confidence and effectiveness. This includes networks for senior leads on teaching and learning and for core subject heads of department. There is evidence that collaboration within the networks has been a particular strength and mutual support has been key in order to ensure consistency of teaching and learning approaches in secondary schools. The senior leaders' Teaching and Learning group covers issues from information-sharing and discussion such as curriculum matters, teaching approaches, assessment, skills' provision and upcoming training opportunities. The group is impactful in bringing leaders together and ensuring a central and frequent dialogue around teaching and learning.

Subject networks have focused on supporting middle leaders to take the lead on teaching and learning; on facilitating and supporting peer collaboration and on strengthening evaluation and improvement planning processes and procedures; on promoting a better understanding of planning and pedagogy in the context of the new curriculum; on improving literacy and numeracy interventions as well as supporting specific aspects of KS4 and KS5 preparations and assessments. The work of the networks is much appreciated by secondary leaders who make effective use of the quality resources that have been jointly developed and hosted on GwE's Support Centre (Tanio websites [Science], MathsCymru [Maths], Y Pair [Welsh] and Herio [English]).

The English and Literacy networks have been a mixture of delivery of key messages, training and breakout room discussions covering pedagogy development, plans and approaches for GCSE, developing literacy, retrieval practice and oracy strategies. Following Heads of Maths network meetings, individual schools have been given further support to implement various approaches that have been discussed. Heads of Science meetings provide an opportunity for discussions and activities on planning, delivering and evaluating their new CfW activities, GCSE schemes of work, examples of assessments and pedagogical approaches that are working well in their schools.

The impact of the subject networks is clear on several levels and across a range of aspects:
- middle leaders have been up skilled in their knowledge and understanding of methodology and quality of planning e.g., recall strategies, strategies to improve oral and writing work, use of technical equipment to develop subject skills etc.
- middle leaders have improved their knowledge and understanding of the 12 pedagogical principles and preparations for the new curriculum.
- good practices have been disseminated and are being more widely adopted. A considerable number of leaders have noted their appreciation of the opportunities to share ideas and developments and to support one another professionally.
- increasing use of the digital library resources on GwE's Support Centre and of the subject websites to improve learner experiences, to prepare learners for examinations and to prepare purposeful intervention programmes.
- leaders and teachers are more confident in their digital skills.
- leaders are more confident with pupil predictions, assessment and grading.
- effective targeting to promote Welsh oracy skills.

In addition to the networks and forums, specific support is available to all individual secondary schools and this targeting has resulted in clear improvements in several instances. The content of the Support Plan for individual schools is based on the school's specific needs arising from their self-evaluation and which is a priority in the School Development Plan. Support to improve aspects of teaching and learning underpins these plans. They are jointly

produced with the senior management teams and Supporting Improvement Adviser. The relationship and collaboration between schools and GwE is very strong, and the positive impact of the support is evident in several aspects of schools' work. For schools in statutory category, the content of their Support Plans has been verified and ratified by Estyn through their monitoring processes.

Any primary schools causing concern are carefully monitored by GwE and the local authority. Where necessary a bespoke support plan will be agreed with the school, and this has led to marked improvement in those schools. Since September 2022, Supporting Improvement Advisers have been working with primary leaders to develop bespoke support plans for all schools. This aligns with expectations in the new School Improvement Framework. There are numerous examples of purposeful and effective support for schools on improving specific aspects of teaching and learning. For example, all SIAs support their schools in monitoring learning through a range of evidence including work scrutiny, learning walks and listening to learners and staff. This enables primary leaders to refine their monitoring and self-evaluation in order to develop more focused areas of improvement. SIAs provide guidance or signpost relevant professional learning or link schools to support. This enables each primary school to receive bespoke targeted support.

There is robust evidence that the toolkit for 3-8-year-olds at individual school, cluster or authority level, is effective. In most schools, this has had a positive impact on provision and pupil outcomes as well as reducing variation within schools. The support has also ensured a deeper understanding of Foundation Phase principles and pedagogy, in line with the Curriculum for Wales 'Enabling Learning' and 'Pedagogy' guidance. The toolkit includes a professional offer for SLT, teachers and assistants of 3-8-year-olds in the form of termly networks, a regional training programme and bespoke cluster training. The focus is primarily on developing aspects of pedagogy, teaching and well-being within practical and holistic learning experiences, and training practitioners to develop as effective learning facilitators. All practitioners have access to the professional offer and resources to support learning via GwE's Support Centre. Many schools within the Authority use the webinars in staff meetings and INSET to up-skill the workforce. Evidence from schools note that this has a positive impact on the quality of provision (teaching and learning experiences) and on pupil outcomes.

Since 2019, the professional offer has involved Year 3 practitioners in order to build on some of the Foundation Principles in KS2 in preparation for Curriculum for Wales. The professional offer continued throughout lockdown with the provision planned to target those aspects identified by schools as needing to be prioritised following Covid-19, e.g., pupils' communication skills and health and well-being. The focus was upon developing these skills within appropriate developmental pedagogy. Evidence of the impact of this support programme includes:
- deepening practitioners' understanding of how the pedagogical principles (including 12 CfW principles) link with one another to create productive and effective learning experiences.
- practitioners using a range of developmentally appropriate pedagogical methods that meet the needs of learners (including emotional and social skills).
- practitioners creating effective cross-curricular links to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum, drawing on learners' previous knowledge and experiences.
- practitioners not only considering the physical learning environment, but also the emotional climate that supports learners to reach their potential.
- practitioners deepening their understanding of the importance of daily practice in order to improve their understanding of pupils' needs, skills and progress; allowing practitioners to find the preferred learning approaches of children and young people and how best to engage them in learning; identifying those pupils who might require extra support to help them reach their full potential.

- practitioners understanding that effective observations enable them to plan an appropriate provision that supports learner commitment and enjoyment within their learning activities, as well as planning to support them to move on to the next stage in their learning.
- practitioners understanding the need for assessment to be an ongoing process rooted in day-to-day practices, invisible within teaching and learning.

Overall, observations by Supporting Improvement Advisers and Estyn inspection findings where relevant, note that the support programme has a positive impact on the quality of provision and pupil outcomes with practitioners making better use of observations and Assessment for Learning strategies to plan the next stages of learning to allow for progress.

Effective collaboration and engagement between the LA, GwE and schools during and post-COVID further developed approaches to supporting learners who have additional learning needs .As a result, nearly all schools are developing their provision to provide educational equity to all learners and have an inclusive learning environment to support children and young people who are vulnerable to learning so that they achieve more positive outcomes.

Almost all primary schools agree that the support of the Accelerated Learning Programme had a positive impact on basic skills and well-being once children returned to formal education after lockdown periods. All schools had ensured that they carried out an internal assessment procedure, whether qualitative or quantitative, in order to identify the impact of lockdown on children's well-being and learning. Teachers deemed that lockdown affected the confidence and well-being of the majority of pupils, with the behaviour of some pupils having worsened. The accelerated support work was successfully driven by school leaders once baseline standards had been identified.

Nearly all schools have made purposeful use of the various grants, and most have employed or extended teachers' or assistants' hours in order to target groups and individuals in literacy, numeracy and well-being. GwE provided guidance and guidelines, with a good number of schools accessing specific training such as Trauma Informed Schools well-being sessions, SAFMEDS,(Say All Fast Minute Every Day Shuffled), a project to improve pupils basic mathematics fluency skills using an evidence-based teaching strategy, Headsprout (reading programme) and Elklan training (speech and language). Overall, schools have responded well to the challenge and can testify to clear improvements and progress in the basic skills of many of the pupils targeted through these accelerated programmes.

In secondary schools, there was a specific focus on supporting accelerated learning programmes and providing intervention resources in KS3 and guidance on strategies to improve parental engagement. Moreover, a toolkit was developed for Literacy which supports planning and scaffolding opportunities for reading and writing and assisting with learning and developing vocabulary along with revision and recall materials. These have been shared with schools via the Tanio website and GwE's Support Centre. This has resulted in better quality intervention programmes and schools report improved fluency and confidence in learners and a better understanding amongst staff of how to approach scaffolding and planning.

In Digital Competence, the professional learning offer has been in place in all schools in the Authority. The offer focuses on making effective use of the services available through Hwb to develop teaching and learning and to develop learners' digital competence. In light of training, there has been an average increase of over 500% in the number of learners logging on to Hwb every month. There has been an average monthly increase of nearly 300% in the number of times every learner engages with Hwb, compared to 2017. By now, all schools in the Authority engage with Hwb with almost all schools making regular and effective use.

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A Digital Facilitator Programme has been introduced where each cluster has nominated an individual to be a Digital Facilitator - to work closely with the Learning Service and GwE in order to develop strategic leadership from the digital field within the cluster. 90% of the clusters in Flintshire have formed a digital learning working group to lead developments within the field, and 93% of schools engage with these groups. 90% of the clusters have formed a shared vision for digital learning. So far, 226 practitioners across Flintshire have received training through this programme.

CURRICULUM AND PROVISION

Summary of main actions, engagement and impact
Due to effective collaboration and engagement between the LA, GwE and schools:
- all schools are implementing plans to deliver against the four purposes of the new curriculum.
- all schools are working to develop a balanced curriculum offer to meet the needs of their learners including the more able.
- all clusters are implementing transition plans.
- all schools are actively engaging in peer collaboration within and across sectors.

The regional service has effectively supported leaders in preparation for The Reform Journey and Curriculum for Wales and has been flexible in its provision in order to meet schools' various needs during the pandemic. Sessions were held for leaders on leading change, vision and curriculum design and think-pieces shared that were developed in collaboration with Professor Graham Donaldson. These training sessions were run in the form of small clusters of primary schools and their secondary schools in order for a meaningful discussion to take place across the 3-16 continuum. In June and July 2021, Professional Learning sessions were held over a 3-week period for senior leaders, focusing on developing vision, curriculum design and development. These sessions were delivered virtually in clusters and provided rich and regular opportunities for breakout discussions with peers. Successful follow-up catchment area sessions were run by supporting improvement advisers to drive further collaboration and create a joint catchment area vision.

A high-level of engagement has ensured that schools are more confident in implementing the Curriculum for Wales. Primary/secondary collaboration has been strengthened significantly and the four transversal themes of Schools as Learning Organisations have emerged in their approach - Time, Technology, Trust and Thinking Together. The Professional Learning presentations to senior leaders have been cascaded to teachers and assistants via staff meetings and/or specific INSET, meaning that all staff now have a better understanding of the framework. Effective use is made of the resources presented in the leaders' sessions in order to continue with discussions and deepen understanding back at school.

Representatives from most clusters attended a recent GwE professional learning workshop on transition, where each cluster planned their net steps collaboratively in order to improve pupils' progression across the learning continuum. This professional learning built upon a regional two-day conference which included updates from Estyn, Welsh Government and educational experts in order to set our shared approach to school improvement. As a result, all primary catchment areas have started working on a joint action plan in order to plan curriculum delivery and a consistent approach towards progression. SIAs have continued to support all clusters in developing their approaches to transition throughout this year. This has led to a greater consistency in the quality of curriculum planning within and across schools.

LEARNER PROGRESS AND STANDARDS

Summary of learner progress and standards across the Local Authority

Secondary schools
The increased focus on supporting schools to improve the quality and consistency of leadership and pedagogy has led to improved standards across nearly all secondary schools. Impact of teaching and provision on pupils' progress continues to be a priority in all secondary schools. Impact to date:

- all secondary schools are making more intelligent use of data and teaching, learning and assessment information to evaluate standards and to identify priorities for further improvement. In a few schools, these processes require further strengthening to ensure a greater focus on pupil progress.
- all secondary schools are delivering tracking and intervention programmes to address identified underperformance and in-school variance. In a few schools, these approaches need to be further strengthened and honed.
- nearly all secondary schools are developing a purposeful offer for KS4 pupils so that when they leave school there is a clear progression to further education, training or employment.
- all secondary schools are using a wide range of qualitative and quantitative information to monitor progress in learning.
- all secondary schools are strengthening their provision to ensure that pupils make expected progress in literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

In most cases pupils respond to feedback and this provides an opportunity for them to make further progress. Many pupils are making meaningful progress to develop their skills through consistent and effective questioning and feedback including peer feedback.

In many Flintshire secondary schools most of the pupils listen with attention and show respect to their teachers and to each other. Many are eager to contribute to class discussions, are secure in their use of subject-specific vocabulary and offer suitable verbal responses. Across the authority around half of the pupils have a wide vocabulary and express themselves well verbally. Currently, however, a few pupils lack confidence in their verbal skills. A few do not provide fluent responses and struggle to express themselves clearly. Pupils' use of reading strategies across the curriculum in KS3 and KS4 is much more variable from school to school. A majority of pupils use subject-specific vocabulary securely while a few pupils are encouraged to use more ambitious vocabulary. Many of the pupils have sound basic number skills. The majority of pupils can interpret questions and solve problems when guided by the teacher, but a minority struggle to do so independently. Pupils in Flintshire have appropriate opportunities to practise their digital competence skills during lessons.

Examination outcomes, in the main, are a true reflection of schools' own tracking of data and evaluation of standards.

Primary schools
The increased focus on supporting schools to improve the quality and consistency of leadership and pedagogy has led to improved standards across nearly all primary schools. Pace of improvement needs further acceleration in a minority of primary schools.

- the literacy, numeracy and digital skills of most pupils are developing well, with a range of opportunities to apply these skills across the curriculum in most schools. Through regular assessments and self-evaluation processes, school leaders recognise where learners need a range of interventions and whole school approaches are identified and implemented. Nearly all schools report that these interventions have aided their pupils in returning to school and that nearly all pupils, including ALN and more vulnerable pupils, are making good progress, with the interventions having a positive impact on

standards. Pupils in many schools are developing good Welsh skills and they communicate with increasing confidence. However, the impact of the pandemic has adversely affected the literacy skills of the minority of pupils in both English and Welsh. These aspects have been addressed within individual school improvement plans and actions identified to support this.

- nearly all primary schools are making effective use of observations and Assessment for Learning strategies to plan the next stages of learning to ensure that pupils make expected progress in literacy, numeracy and digital skills and to identify priorities for further improvement. In a few schools, these processes require further strengthening to ensure a greater focus on pupil progress.

- schools are beginning to establish a shared understanding of progress within their individual settings and are beginning to develop opportunities to ensure a shared understanding of progression and standards across their clusters, working to share expertise across the schools.

SUPPORT AND CHALLENGE FOR SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN

Summary of actions and impact

Flintshire Local Authority responds promptly and firmly where there are schools causing concern. There are specific examples where intensifying the challenge and support alongside robust and prompt action have directly resulted in improvements. There is strong evidence that the Local Authority's actions to support schools causing concern is effective.

As part of the regional approach, the Local Authority has further strengthened its support and challenge procedures. A clear school causing concern strategy is in place and all schools identified have a holistic support plan clearly articulating the nature and intensity of the support provided and the improvements needed.

For schools whose performance is consistently strong or strong overall, improvements are addressed through peer collaboration, LA and GwE generic Professional Learning Programme and the bespoke support plan for the school. However, when Flintshire and GwE procedures highlight a concern, more intense support is targeted through the local multi-agency approach and the regular Standards and Quality Board meetings.

Lead officers from the relevant services meet regularly to share information and evidence so that concerns are identified at an early stage and shared with the GwE Core Lead in Standards meetings. Thresholds and triggers have been adopted to ensure consistency in identifying concerns in relation to standards, teaching and learning, assessment, leadership, inclusion or managerial matters. Once a school is identified as causing concern, the Lead Officer, Core Lead and Supporting Improvement Adviser will work with the school's leadership team to develop a holistic 360^0 support plan. In Flintshire, the Standards group monitors on a twice-monthly basis and will refer to the Quality Board for placement on, or removal off, a $360°$ support plan. GwE take responsibility for ensuring that the $360°$ support plan is developed, delivered and monitored. Where concerns arise about lack or pace of progress, these are escalated to the Chief Education Officer and the Quality Board so that an appropriate decision is taken regarding whether or not to execute statutory powers. In Flintshire there is a regular and effective flow of information between LA officers and GwE advisers.

Appendix 1

FLINTSHIRE SECONDARY SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT

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IMPROVING LEADERSHIP

Many leadership teams in Flintshire have had significant personnel changes in the last few years with the aim of strengthening leadership across the whole school and to fostering a real sense of teamwork in the work that they do. This is contributing to a change in the culture and ethos of the schools. The senior leadership teams, in general, work cohesively and the clarity of roles enable them to work according to their strengths. In a few schools they have experienced significant challenges around leadership over the last three years, experiencing periods of interim leadership. However, all secondary schools now have a substantive headteacher in post. In one school this coincided with the school's Estyn inspection which resulted in a judgment of 'significant improvement' and a recommendation around leadership. The new headteacher is now working on redefining and aligning the responsibilities of the leadership team, ensuring, for example, that there is sufficient capacity within the team to support wellbeing and care, support and guidance.

Regular and focused meetings, as well as effective line management meetings have improved the quality of leadership across the LA. Robust self-evaluation systems, lead to schools having a clear understanding of their strengths and areas for development, the recognition of appropriate priorities and accurate improvement planning.

Detailed analysis of assessment data, pre and post pandemic, allows the schools to have confidence in the accuracy of their data for tracking purposes, which in turn allows for effective intervention to be put in place. The rigour of support and challenge provided by senior leaders, with the support of GwE and the LA, is on the whole effective and contributes towards the increased impact in learning outcomes.

Following reviews with the regional consortium, the Professional Learning models and lesson observation focus on continually improving quality of teaching and learning has given rise to opportunities for coaching conversations. This has led to a narrowing of in-school variance in terms of quality of teaching. Joint lesson observation allows SLT to model effective feedback across the whole staff. Across the LA there is a clear commitment to professional learning which contributes to the consistent quality of teaching. In a minority of schools there is a need for greater consistency from Middle Leaders in their approaches, and for a more accurate evaluation of standards in the areas they oversee.

Staff from the regional service have worked alongside the senior leadership teams in reviews of provision in their predominantly core areas and emerging Areas of Learning Experience (AoLEs). Collaboration has shown that most senior leaders know their school well and identify strengths and areas for improvement accurately.

In most secondary schools there is clear vision for the development of the new curriculum and nearly all members of staff are challenged to ensure the curriculum is 'better not just different.' Effective practice of research and enquiry, supported by GwE, show that members of school leadership teams in Flintshire have a developing philosophy for curriculum design and effective pedagogy. A majority of staff are embracing change, inspired to trial and reflect and leaders are empowered to challenge and support to ensure further improvement.

Across the authority a majority of secondary schools have clear and effective processes in place for appropriate and accurate self-evaluation. The schools' improvement planning processes have been further developed as a result of regional consortium training on self-evaluation and improvement planning. In many schools improved Quality Enhancement work, which includes a more structured framework around teaching and learning alongside the evaluation of it, has led to greater impact, In Flintshire schools there has been a focus this

year on the further development of senior and middle leaders' ability to evaluate and plan for improvement so that it becomes a team process where all are involved and have ownership.

In nearly all Flintshire secondary schools, senior leaders hold middle leaders to account through regular line management meetings. These meetings tend to focus on addressing the findings from evaluation processes and reviewing improvement priorities. In the majority of schools senior leaders know their school well and identify strengths and areas for improvement accurately and middle leaders are increasingly able to do so. The rigour of support and challenge provided by senior leaders is more consistent and contributes towards the improved impact of middle leaders on schools' work.

Many Flintshire secondary schools address any underperformance of teachers effectively through targeted support plans. Performance management arrangements are on the whole robust, with targets based on the school's main priorities. In the majority of schools, lines of accountability are clear to all staff and robust self-evaluation systems, lead to the school having a clear understanding of their strengths and areas for development, the recognition of appropriate priorities and accurate improvement planning.

Staff from the regional service have worked alongside middle leaders to complete reviews of provision in their areas. In many schools, middle leaders' evaluation of teaching considers a suitable range of evidence including assessment data and canvassing the opinions of pupils. Most middle leaders identify strengths and areas for improvement in teaching in their faculties/departments appropriately, but more support is needed to enable them all to focus closely enough on the progress made by pupils and the impact of teaching on standards.

Addressing Further Improvements for Flintshire High Schools

- Continue to provide coaching for headteachers that will contribute to effectiveness, resilience and wellbeing.
- Continue to work alongside, support and improve the quality of improvement planning at all levels.
- Further improve the skill and ability of middle leaders to effectively lead on developing teaching and learning within their respective departments.
- In some schools, there is a need to move from focusing over-strongly on compliance to a more rounded understanding of standards and progress.
- In nearly all schools, there is more work to do on cementing strong links between self-evaluation and development planning.
- Some schools are in areas of significant deprivation and have been significantly impacted by the pandemic; this has manifested in an increase in non-attendance in key groups of learners in addition to an increase in safeguarding referrals, both of which place the senior team under challenge and pressure. We need to continue to work to mitigate covid impacts moving forward.

IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING

In nearly all Flintshire secondary schools, regular reviews of teaching are completed by school leaders at all levels alongside GwE verification and in most cases, there was at least good standards in the quality of teaching. Senior leaders strive to establish a clear vision for teaching, and this is understood well by almost all staff members. Many schools have made priority areas for this year the development of oral skills in the classroom and ensuring that feedback is effective. Many schools have a sound understanding of the principles of what constitutes effective assessment and understand how approaches need to evolve further and where support may be needed. Book reviews undertaken this year have showed that while practice is improving in this area there is further room for development.

Strategies for identifying and sharing effective practice are well developed and Professional Learning Communities are giving the majority of teachers opportunity to contribute to and develop their practices. In the best examples in schools in Flintshire, questioning is good and used to develop learner response and understanding. However in some lessons, schools have identified that learners are too passive. Professional learning is being undertaken to support improvement and to equip teachers with a repertoire of skills to engage learners in oracy.

In many schools, senior leaders have established a clear vision for teaching, and this is understood well by almost all staff members in respective schools. In many lessons, teachers foster strong working relationships with pupils and are good language models. They have sound subject knowledge and use this to provide helpful verbal feedback to pupils. In many schools, teachers manage pupils' behaviour well. A majority of Flintshire secondary school teachers provide clear explanations of important concepts and helpful instructions that support pupils to engage in activities. They have appropriate expectations of their pupils, plan engaging tasks that build suitably on pupils' prior learning and provide useful feedback to pupils about their work.

In schools with sixth forms most post-16 pupils have positive attitudes towards learning, and many main-school pupils continue into the sixth form and successfully transition into post-18 study, apprenticeships, or work. Those pupils not continuing into the sixth form are offered a high level of support and commitment to ensure they have the most appropriate learning or work-based pathway to follow.

Addressing Further Improvements for Flintshire High schools

- Continue to develop pupils' oracy and writing skills across the curriculum. Effectively address accuracy in writing, particularly with boys.
- Continue to raise aspirations with more consistently high levels of challenge and expectation.
- Embed best practice in feedback and ensuring greater consistency
- Ensure 'coaching' support for teaching and learning leads.
- Support leaders at all levels to effectively evaluate the impact of initiatives.
- Further enhance and augment opportunities for the development of digital skills.

CURRICULUM AND PROVISION

In nearly all Flintshire secondary schools, senior leaders and learning directors are working diligently on consolidating the vision for designing a curriculum, recognising strengths as well as areas for development alongside all stakeholders. In general, staff are committed and motivated and there exists cultures within the schools to innovate and change the curriculum in order to better meet the needs of pupils. Members of school senior leadership teams across Flintshire have attended GwE webinars, workshops and forum's and have a firm understanding of curriculum design considerations. In the majority of schools, senior leaders have carried out extensive work to support middle leaders to drive curriculum changes including the challenges associated with working with the structure of the framework. The Flintshire Deputy Heads' forum has provided colleagues with an understanding of a clear route through the framework in order to ensure sense making. Most schools are adopting a largely disciplinary approach but with some they are undertaking multi-disciplinary 'trials' e.g., within Expressive Arts and Science and Technology

Nearly all schools place a high focus on pedagogy, linking this with student progress. They have clear and developing assessment policies linked to the principles of progression.

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Although schools in the authority did not commit to curriculum rollout for 2022, senior and middle leaders planned the learning for years 7 and 8 for implementation in September 2023.

A majority of schools have undertaken curriculum mapping in order to support the linking of experiences, sequencing of learning and also to allow for more effective transition. Schools have also taken part in GwE's Transition Project. Transition plans are strengthening with effective collaboration taking place across AOLEs. In the majority of schools progression of curriculum and rich transition events allow smooth transfer from year 6 to 7.

All Flintshire secondary schools are involved in at least one alliance, and this brings peer evaluation, verification, and challenge to the partner schools in a collegiate framework.

Addressing Further Improvements for Flintshire High Schools
- Continue focused work on Transition Projects around developing consistent teaching approaches from years 5-8.
- Continue to hold regular meetings with Alliance schools to ensure emerging good practice can be shared.
- GwE and Flintshire LA to continue to work alongside schools to construct, trial and evaluate a curriculum in line with CfW framework for initially Year 7 and Year 8, that promotes a broad range of knowledge, skills and experiences and that learners are making progress towards the four purposes.
- GwE and Flintshire LA to work alongside the schools to develop a range of assessment approaches to track pupil progress in line with curricular changes.
- Teachers' planning needs to focus more sharply on the specific skills, knowledge and understanding that they want pupils to learn.

LEARNER PROGRESS AND STANDARDS

In most cases in Flintshire secondary schools, pupils respond to feedback and this provides an opportunity for them to make further progress. Many pupils are making meaningful progress to develop their skills through consistent and effective questioning and feedback including peer feedback.

In many Flintshire schools most pupils listen with attention and show respect to their teachers and to each other. Many are eager to contribute to class discussions, are secure in their use of subject-specific vocabulary and offer suitable verbal responses. Across the authority around half of the pupils have a wide vocabulary and express themselves well verbally. Currently, however, a few pupils lack confidence in their verbal skills. A few do not provide fluent responses and struggle to express themselves clearly. Pupils' use of reading strategies across the curriculum in KS3 and KS4 is much more variable from school to school. A majority of pupils use subject-specific vocabulary securely while a few pupils are encouraged to use more ambitious vocabulary. Many pupils have sound basic number skills. The majority of pupils can interpret questions and solve problems when guided by the teacher, but a minority struggle to do so independently. Pupils in Flintshire have appropriate opportunities to practise their digital competence skills during lessons.

Examination outcomes are, in the main, a true reflection of the school's own tracking data and evaluation of standards.

Addressing Further Improvements for Flintshire High Schools

- To work with GwE and the LA to continue to improve standards in Welsh.

- Improve opportunities for pupils to develop their extended writing skills across the curriculum.
- Improve consistency and quality of feedback so that pupils can engage with and respond to feedback in a timely manner.
- Increase quality opportunities for pupils to apply numeracy and digital competence skills across the curriculum.
- Addressing concerns that a minority of pupils make only limited progress and are too passive in their lessons, often as the result of shortcomings in teaching.

SUPPORT AND CHALLENGE FOR SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN

Summary of actions and impact

There are currently three secondary schools under a 360° support plan in Flintshire.
Across these schools there is a need to strengthen senior and middle leadership, to develop a shared understanding of what effective teaching and learning looks like and to enhance the development of skills (literacy, numeracy and digital competence). Further work needs to be done on strengthening assessment and progression and how this is evidenced in books and lesson scrutiny.

Priorities for these schools include:

- SLT roles are equitably shared and clearly understood by the senior leadership team. Leaders at all levels can articulate a clear shared vision.
- Leaders at all levels are held to account through clear line-management which is built on robust quality enhancement procedures and through clear governance.
- Performance management identifies and supports underperformance through challenge, accountability and professional development.
- Reviews of lesson objectives with a view to developing wider use of differentiated learner outcomes. Appropriate challenge and support should be key themes. Personalised learning will be an important lens through which to view the development of all aspects of teaching.
- Development of questioning – central to deeper learner understanding, effective Assessment for Learning and encouraging extended oral responses.
- Development of classroom provision for skills starting with a focus on oracy (speaking and listening). This is a good foundation for reading and writing.
- Improved literacy is the key to curriculum access for the less able (and often socially disadvantaged) learners. These schools will need to continue work on agreed whole school strategies for developing literacy, numeracy and Welsh.
- Developing learner independence – Curriculum for Wales is a vehicle for this.

Appendix 2

FLINTSHIRE PRIMARY SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT

IMPROVING LEADERSHIP

Flintshire Local Authority consists of ten primary clusters; the Alun, Argoed/Elfed, Castell Alun, Connah's Quay, Flint, Hawarden, Holywell, Maes Garmon, St. David's and St. Richard Gwyn clusters. These clusters vary in their size, communities, and context, especially in the number of learners entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) and levels of deprivation, with a few clusters also operating over a wide geographical area. In the more rural clusters, most of the head teachers also have a teaching commitment. Headteachers range from the most experienced in the authority to those either appointed to their first headship at the beginning of the pandemic or those newly appointed to their first headteacher post recently. Over the last year ten schools have had an acting headteacher for a period of time. The reasons for having an acting headteacher position are varied and could be a response to long term sickness absence, career secondments or where a school is subject to processes of organisational change where a permanent appointment may not be appropriate. Acting Headteacher arrangements are always agreed between the Local Authority and the school's Governing Body. Five other schools have new heads appointed in the last 2 years. Nearly all clusters have developed a robust, effective, and collaborative approach to working. These models for effective partnership include working towards a shared vision based on honesty and trust to support a self-improving system. In the best practice, schools within the clusters are becoming increasingly accountable to each other and have used the School Partnership Programme framework to facilitate collaborative working. The collaboration with the local secondary school is generally strong across all clusters. There is representation from the secondary school at all head teacher level cluster meetings and cluster working parties.

In the majority of schools across the authority, leadership is very good and very few schools require support to develop leadership capacity. Where leadership is very good, leaders have a clear staffing structure, with leaders on all levels aware of their responsibilities and empowered to contribute well to self-evaluation and improvement processes. Senior leaders hold middle leaders accountable through effective line management. These schools have established robust self-evaluation procedures, gradually evolving them to consider the requirements of the new curriculum and the new school improvement and evaluation framework. In addition, many schools have developed their self-evaluation processes to engage with stakeholders, for example, re-establishing joint learning walks with governors. These schools have a very good understanding of their schools' strengths and areas for improvement and their improvement plans are comprehensive with priorities clearly aligned with findings of the evaluation processes. Leaders ensure that all staff have access to professional learning in line with individual needs and performance management findings. Estyn inspections during 2022-23 recognise that most school leaders know their schools well and that arrangements to monitor and evaluate the school's work and impact using first-hand evidence is well embedded.

Headteachers and senior leaders across most of the authority's schools have engaged well in GwE self-evaluation and improvement planning workshops and have evaluated and identified areas of leadership that need to be strengthened within their schools. There is a high level of collaboration on shared strategic priorities. Within individual schools, teachers work well together and good practices are shared across schools. However, there is less formal collaboration at teacher level between schools. Many schools have committed to the School Partnership Programme to strengthen school to school partnerships and self-evaluation

procedures, with a few asking for bespoke follow up sessions. They all work on the ethos of continuous improvement and share openly across their cluster. A minority of schools have been identified as needing additional support to develop leadership aspects and the Local Authority and GwE have been very active in supporting leadership development within these schools with bespoke 360° plan packages.

The Covid pandemic has had an adverse effect on pupils' Welsh language skills across many Flintshire schools and many of the schools inspected during 2021-23 academic years received an Estyn recommendation to strengthen the provision to develop pupils' Welsh language skills. Many schools have identified this as an area for their school development plans for 23-24 and action plans will address this priority. One school has been invited to write a case study for Estyn on their good practice in developing the Welsh language. Two other schools have been identified with particular strength in Welsh to be shared across the region. One has shared its second language provision and another the strong ethos among its pupils of using Welsh fluently and voluntarily in informal and unstructured situations. Nearly all clusters are committed to developing the Welsh language across their schools and the majority ensure that the ethos and provision of the school promotes learners' enjoyment of learning and speaking Welsh. Many schools develop pupils' pride in the language, its heritage and culture as well as a sense of honour in being bilingual citizens. All clusters support the national priority of developing One Million Welsh Speakers by 2050 and are keen to ensure that they work in partnership with the Local Authority to support this priority through actions identified within the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan.

Addressing Further Improvements
- Continue to strengthen focused collaboration and peer engagement within the cluster and with other schools to strengthen self-evaluation processes
- Continue to provide La and GWE support during induction of new headteachers.
- Further improve and hone the quality of improvement planning at all leadership levels and continue to promote effective collaboration on a cluster level to meet the requirements of the School Improvement Framework.
- Further develop engagement with the Schools Partnership Programme (SPP) to develop the capability and culture between schools to lead their own improvement through a continuous cycle of school self-review, peer review and school-to-school support and improvement.
- Continue to support leaders and teachers to embed Curriculum for Wales.
- Collaborate fully with the Local Authority to identify clear priorities for developing opportunities in Welsh language and provision.

IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING

In Flintshire, the quality of teaching is generally strong across most primary schools. The majority of schools have prioritised time to focus on the twelve pedagogical principles during staff meetings, using the GwE 12 pedagogical principles reflection tool as a starting point to identify the schools' strengths and areas for further development. In a few clusters, an SIA has delivered bespoke training on deepening understanding of pedagogy within the context of Curriculum for Wales. The pedagogical principles are starting to permeate the planning of rich tasks in many schools with renewed attention given by teachers to authentic and purposeful contexts, outdoor tasks, and exciting creative projects which lead to positive outcomes on pupils' learning. For example, in one school, all teachers plan and evaluate innovations in teaching and learning in order to share more widely across the region, sharing effective practice and professional learning opportunities, holding open days, producing resource packs and hosting one to one visits from other practitioners.

In nearly all schools, teachers foster strong working relationships with pupils and are good language models. Nearly all schools ensure regular opportunities for learners to develop and apply literacy, numeracy, and digital skills across the curriculum. Almost all primary leaders report that the targeting of basic skills post pandemic through the Accelerated Learning Programme had a positive impact on pupil's basic skills. Well-being is considered a strength in nearly all schools, with good teaching of health and well-being, and effective use of interventions post Covid. These interventions impact positively on standards of most pupils' behaviour and readiness/engagement in learning. The arrangements and provision for ALN pupils is another strength within most clusters with many clusters having used grant funding to ensure that schools have an identified Trauma Informed Schools trained member of staff.

Most schools have participated in GwE's Formative Assessment (Shirley Clarke) project over three tiers. In the majority of schools, assessment for learning strategies have been embedded well and this has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching in classes. Many teachers have appropriate expectations of their pupils, plan engaging tasks that build suitably on pupils' prior learning and provide useful feedback to pupils about their work, which has had good impact on pupils' standards and progress. Following return to school from the pandemic a few schools have prioritised re-embedding and further developing formative assessment within their School Development Plans. The GwE literacy, numeracy and foundation learning team have identified areas of good practice across the authority, for example in the development of reading and extended writing, pedagogical approaches in the outside learning environment and in the development of the mathematical proficiencies and have commissioned Flintshire teachers to support other schools across the local authority.

Effective provision for Foundation Learning is well established in nearly all schools, with many experienced and knowledgeable practitioners successfully implementing the 'Foundation Learning' pedagogy. Opportunities for outdoor learning is also established in many schools. One school employs a specialist leader to deliver regular outdoor activities for all pupils. Another school's recent extensive re-modelling of the school has improved the provision of outdoor learning, but this remains an identified priority for the school. Another school has recently enhanced the quality of provision in the shared wet area to ensure pupils experience a wide range of engaging, purposeful experiences to support their learning.

All schools have trialled, amended and adopted a range of new approaches to deliver the curriculum and have worked collaboratively to provide a more a creative and engaging curriculum for their pupils and continue to refine, as necessary. For example, one school introduced a new topic which includes a whole school trip to Chester Zoo. As a result, pupil engagement and enjoyment of learning has improved. The school was praised by Estyn for their engaging curriculum and attention to authentic and purposeful contexts, outdoor tasks, and exciting creative projects.

In one school, the cluster SIA has delivered bespoke training on deepening understanding of the statements of What Matters in the Humanities area of learning and experience within the context of Curriculum for Wales. In another school, the 'narrative curriculum' involves a project to support oracy for writing, which provides relevant and authentic contexts for learning and encourages pupils to take responsibility for their learning. Another example highlights innovative learning through engaging and purposeful outdoor projects planned such as the Community Shop and scrapyard.

In a few schools, where provision for improving teaching and learning needs to be developed, additional support has been provided by the regional consortium. For example, the Literacy, 3-8 Foundation Learning and Digital School Improvement Advisers are working closely with one school on developing reading, writing, Welsh and digital skills.

Well-being is a key priority for schools across the authority. In one cluster for example, a shared strategy has been adopted to address this. The schools used their LAC PDG funding to ensure that all staff had bespoke training on trauma informed schools from Dr Coral Harper. One school delivers the 'Quiet Place' programme and has provided outreach to the other schools in the cluster.

Addressing Further Improvements
- Further develop good practice in pedagogy (teaching and learning) through cluster collaboration and the School Partnership Programme.
- Further develop aspects of formative assessment within individual schools, sharing best practice across the cluster.
- Further develop provision for developing learners' Welsh oral skills
- Continue to strengthen the collaboration of peers, further developing opportunities for teachers to share aspects of excellent teaching of rich learning experiences
- Address any identified in-school variance in quality of learning and teaching.

CURRICULUM AND PROVISION

Good progress has been made in preparing for and implementing the new curriculum with the majority of primary schools in Flintshire engaging in meaningful and robust consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders, to develop a shared vision. These visions are based on the schools' unique factors, values and behaviours and articulate what these mean in practice for learners within the school setting. The work to develop their individual school vision has led to a shared common understanding and vision within the individual clusters. The Welsh language is prominent in schools' curriculum design, and provision reflects this vision appropriately.

In one cluster for example, the vision and key aspects of each schools' respective curriculum designs have been shared with key stakeholders and with other cluster schools in whole day Curriculum for Wales sessions at the secondary school. As a result, many schools have visited each other and /or shared ideas and resources to develop their curriculum and provision further. For example, schools visited one another to observe the implementation of the PSE programme 'Jigsaw.' Additionally, a few schools have also successfully linked this shared vision to church values to reflect the status of the school e.g., the 'pupil purpose values' developed at one church school.

The four purposes have been a key focus for all schools, and they have all engaged their learners in understanding what they mean to them within their individual settings. Many schools have visual representations for the four purposes in classrooms and around the school which have been designed in collaboration with their learners, and in some examples, local artists and designers. In addition to leaders collaborating strategically to develop understanding of curriculum design methodology, teachers across the schools have also had opportunity to work together to develop their planning. Teachers from many primary schools across the local authority have been actively involved in regional and local Curriculum for Wales networks, which has ensured that practice has been shared and local and regional messaging has been disseminated effectively. Teachers in most schools identify opportunities for the four purposes in their planning and have woven them into their curriculum design at a suitable level for their learners to understand. Where appropriate, schools have worked together to develop a shared understanding and to enhance provision. For example, Digi squads from two schools worked together on a Minecraft project mapping the local area. Many schools' websites and social media pages are now celebrating their vision, their direction of the four purposes and their innovative approaches for rich learning experiences. Another school has implemented 'Mastery Mornings' and 'Adventure Afternoons' as a way of implementing the requirements of the curriculum.

To better understand the requirements of the curriculum, all schools have gone through the process of understanding the Curriculum for Wales framework and unpacking the Areas of Learning and Experience. In many schools, the entire staff has been part of this process which has led to a deeper understanding of the requirements as well as an opportunity to discuss how to weave the knowledge, skills and experience identified within an Area of Learning and Experience into authentic and meaningful local contexts. This continues to be refined and developed as schools experiment with teaching methods to ensure rich teaching experiences. As they develop their evaluation processes of the new curriculum, assessment methods to capture progression of learners are being shared. Most schools are beginning to develop new ways of planning for progression within the AoLEs e.g., in one school, teachers assess progression by considering small steps development between progression steps. In another, teachers plan for expressive arts through a local Shakespeare project and celebrate this learning in their purpose-built outdoor amphitheatre.

Work has been undertaken by all primary clusters alongside their secondary schools to consider what constitutes an effective journey for learners along the 3-16 continuum, with a specific focus on transition, and to discuss continuity across phases and the purpose of assessment to support learner progression.

Addressing Further Improvements
- Continue to plan focused collaborative professional learning across individual clusters for teachers and leaders to work together on agreed AOLES.
- Further develop dialogue on developing assessment approaches across the clusters.
- Continue to hold regular meetings with cluster schools to ensure emerging good practice and successful approaches can be shared.
- Continue to develop a deeper shared understanding of the principles of planning and progression within 3-16 continuum.
- Develop more robust systems to report effectively to parents in line with CfW and the Schools Improvement Framework.

LEARNER PROGRESS AND STANDARDS

Standards and the progress pupils make are good in many schools. Regular assessments and robust self-evaluation processes, which include SIA and AOLE leads' joint book monitoring activities, also point to good progress in literacy and numeracy skills in many schools, with a range of opportunities to apply these skills across the curriculum.

Where the attainment of a few pupils is not as expected, schools have identified aspects of literacy and numeracy as priorities in their School Development Plan, i.e., developing numeracy reasoning, extended writing, reading comprehension and developing literacy interventions for targeted pupils. During the return to school following the Covid pandemic all schools were implementing targeted literacy, numeracy, and well-being interventions, with schools reporting that these interventions helped their pupils to return to school and that nearly all pupils, including ALN pupils, made good progress with the interventions having a positive impact on standards. Nearly all schools continue to target specific learners, depending on school staffing levels and through effective use of grants. As a result, a range of interventions and whole school approaches are being implemented with clear timescales for reviewing progress. Following a successful Estyn inspection, one school in the Local Authority was asked to produce a case study on its successful accelerated learning interventions.

All schools have prioritised wellbeing for learners, recognising the need to support all learners on return to school following the pandemic. Across the clusters, many schools are developing as Trauma Informed Schools and have committed to whole cluster training. Schools note that TIS work has had a positive impact on many pupils' well-being to date. Staff are effectively

sharing strategies that promote positive relationships with learners and support children in their wellbeing thus enabling them to make progress in their learning. Support for wellbeing is a strength across the authority, with examples of successful nurture provision in many schools with examples of provision such as a 'Sunshine Room' at one school. Another school was asked to produce a case study on wellbeing provision, following a recent Estyn inspection.

Many schools are successfully developing learners' integral skills and are able to apply them confidently in their work. Independent learning is also embedding well in many schools. All clusters recognise the priority of developing common understanding of progression and assessment methods and have identified actions to support this development. There are agreed cluster collaboration plans to ensure that this is further developed through professional dialogue across schools.

Addressing Further Improvements
- Ensure teaching staff across the clusters are working together to further develop a common understanding of progression in skills.
- Agree on cross cluster systems to capture progress in skills to support effective transition.
- Continue to collaborate to share practice to develop and improve standards in Welsh, in particular oracy skills.
- Identified schools need to further develop pupils' ability to use and apply their literacy, numeracy, and digital skills across the curriculum in line with improvement priorities.

SUPPORT AND CHALLENGE FOR SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN

Summary of actions and impact

There are currently 5 Flintshire Primary Schools on a 360° Support Plan and one school receiving additional support in implementing its post inspection action plan (PIAP).

Each school has bespoke actions agreed. Examples include:

- Ensuring the school is making appropriate progress against its improvement priorities.
- Ensuring that pupils across the school have regular opportunities to engage in independent writing.
- Involving staff at all levels in strategic processes.
- Improving consistency in the quality of teaching and addressing within school variance
- Improving standards in Welsh.
- Developing effective practice in foundation learning

One school in the authority was inspected in September 2022 and placed in the Estyn statutory category of Significant Improvement. As a result, the LA and GwE allocated an experienced headteacher to work alongside the existing SIA to support the school in preparing the Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP) and to support the school with its implementation. Clear progress milestones have been built into a six weekly monitoring cycle in relation to the key issues identified. Monitoring practices involving the senior leadership team and governors are now beginning to impact on standards of learning and provision. For example, a clear system for phonics and guided reading has impacted the use of resources across the school and is beginning to impact on learners' ability to discuss a range of texts. Strategic planning for September 2023 has responded to the need to support progress through the appointment of two experienced practitioners, with all staff moving to new year groups and classroom settings.

Sir y Fflint Flintshire COUNTY COUNCIL

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday, 14th September 2023
Report Subject	School Reserves Year Ending 31st March 2023 and Overview of Schools Current Financial Position
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education and Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The overall level of reserves held by Flintshire schools was £7.243m at 31 March 2023, a decrease of £5.312m compared with the previous year.

A summary of the position at the end of March 2023 is shown in table 1 below.

Table 1

Sector	Reserves 31st March 2023 (£)	% of Budget	Reserves 31st March 2022 (£)	% of Budget	Variance (£)	Variance (%)
PRIMARY	5,018,600	7.9%	8,445,703	16.2%	-3,427,103	-40.58%
SECONDARY	1,851,699	3.4%	3,488,879	7.3%	-1,637,180	-46.93%
SPECIALIST	372,744	7.2%	620,330	14.7%	-247,586	-39.91%
TOTAL	7,243,043	5.9%	12,554,912	12.1%	-5,311,869	-42.31%

The level of school reserves has decreased considerably across all sectors over the past year as expected.

Higher levels of inflation, supporting learners through the on-going impacts of the pandemic, coupled with significant legislative changes to support learners with additional learning needs and a new curriculum have served to increase needs, demands and workloads in schools. All factors combined have resulted in a reduction in the level of school reserves.

Higher levels of uncertainty around future costs due to continued high levels of inflation, not seen for decades, will mean setting future balanced budgets at a council, and at an individual school, level will be very challenging in the medium term. Prudent management of school reserves will be an important component in assisting schools to achieve balanced budgets over this difficult period.

	RECOMMENDATIONS
1	To review the report, the level of school reserves as at the 31 March 2023, and overview of schools' current financial position.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING SCHOOL RESERVES
1.01	The overall level of reserves held by Flintshire schools was £7.243m at 31 March 2023, a decrease of £5.312m compared with the previous year.

A summary of the position at the end of March 2023 is shown in table 1 below.

Table 1

Sector	Reserves 31st March 2023 (£)	% of Budget	Reserves 31st March 2022 (£)	% of Budget	Variance (£)	Variance (%)
PRIMARY	5,018,600	7.9%	8,445,703	16.2%	-3,427,103	-40.58%
SECONDARY	1,851,699	3.4%	3,488,879	7.3%	-1,637,180	-46.93%
SPECIALIST	372,744	7.2%	620,330	14.7%	-247,586	-39.91%
TOTAL	7,243,043	5.9%	12,554,912	12.1%	-5,311,869	-42.31%

The level of reserves each school in Flintshire held at the end of March 2023 is shown at appendix 1, along with the prior year comparator.

Please note that the figures in Table 1 include totals that schools are required to set aside in the ICT HwB Reserve held centrally on schools' behalf. This is to fund future investment in schools ICT and was a requirement by Welsh Government as part of the conditions of the HwB grant to ensure levels of ICT investment in schools in recent years funded by grants are sustained. Totals are £0.526m at March 2023 and £0.263m at March 2022. |
| 1.02 | Overall, the total level of primary school reserves decreased by £3.427m, the total level of secondary schools reserves decreased by £1.637m and the total level of specialist schools reserves decreased by £0.247m.

Table 2 below shows the level of school reserves at the year-end over the past 5 years.

Table 2

Sector	Reserves 31st March 2023 (£)	Reserves 31st March 2022 (£)	Reserves 31st March 2021 (£)	Reserves 31st March 2020 (£)	Reserves 31st March 2019 (£)
PRIMARY	5,018,600	8,445,703	6,025,937	1,901,956	2,565,109
SECONDARY	1,851,699	3,488,879	472,112	-2,076,302	-1,454,811
SPECIALIST	372,744	620,330	404,402	286,303	224,789
TOTAL	7,243,043	12,554,912	6,902,451	111,956	1,335,087

	Prior to the pandemic, in 2018/19 and 2019/20 the level of school reserves were very low and was a cause for concern for all. During the height of the pandemic, in both financial years 2020/21 and 2021/22 Welsh Government provided significant additional funding to all schools through specific grants which had the effect of increasing the level of school reserves. Whilst grants are still being made by Welsh Government to support the ongoing effects of the pandemic, overall grant funding levels have reduced in 2022/23. Higher levels of inflation, supporting learners through the on-going impacts of the pandemic, coupled with significant legislative changes to support learners with additional learning needs and a new curriculum have served to increase needs, demands and workloads in schools. All these factors combined have resulted in a reduction in the level of school reserves.

1.03	**Council's role in monitoring the level of School Reserves.**
	
	The School Funding (Wales) Regulations 2010 require local authorities to have the following provisions in their Scheme for Financing Schools:
	
	The use that a governing body proposes to make of a surplus in the school balance which exceeds 5% of the school budget share or £10,000, whichever is the greater.
	
	A provision under which–
	(a) the authority may direct the governing body as to how to spend a surplus in the school balance for a funding period, if–
	      (i) in the case of a primary school the surplus is £50,000 or more, and
	      (ii) in the case of a secondary school or a special school the surplus is £100,000 or more;
	
	(b) the authority may, if the governing body do not comply with such a direction, require the governing body to pay all or part of that surplus to the authority to be applied as part of their schools' budget for the funding period in question.

1.04	In accordance with the Regulations, the Council's Scheme for Financing Schools requires a spending plan from schools to confirm the use that the governing body proposes to make of a school balance which exceeds the limits specified. Given the level of uncertainty within which schools were preparing to set their 2023/24 budget, and the impact of grants in recent years from Welsh Government, the Council notified all schools that it would not be automatically clawing back school reserves in excess of 5% of school budget share at 31st March 2023. However, schools were advised that the Council would require more detailed information to better understand each school's financial position at 31st March 2023 and each governing body's plan for spending reserves in excess of the 5% level over the medium term (3 years).

| | Schools were required to complete a revised 'School Reserve Declaration Form', by 30th June, alongside setting their annual budget. An example form is attached at Appendix 2 for information.

Analysis of the completed forms shows that the main reasons schools gave for balances being excess of the 5% of school budget recommendation are as follows:
- A challenging recruitment market with conditions generally making it difficult to recruit, especially employees on a supply or temporary basis or specialisms such as teachers of Welsh.
- Building / premises projects that schools had planned and had set reserves aside to fund haven't been able to take place due to issues and delays related to difficulties in finding contractors, sourcing materials, and works also needing to coincide with school holidays.
- Reserves built up due to a combination of additional resources and savings from periods of school closures during the pandemic.
- Reserves purposefully built up to fund a predicted shortfall in funding in future years due to falling pupil numbers.
- Reserves purposefully built up due to uncertainty over future funding levels and reductions to school budgets.

Plans schools have for spending their reserves over the medium term are as follows:
- Reserves to be used in balancing future budgets / maintaining existing levels of expenditure when the number of pupils on roll, and therefore funding, falls.
- Increasing levels of employees to reduce class sizes and raise standards / focus on catch up learning as a result of the pandemic.
- Increasing demands to support pupils with Additional Learning Needs over and above delegated funding received
- Purchasing additional resources and ICT equipment.
- Building and premises projects e.g. a numbers of schools have indicated that they need to invest in fencing linked to safeguarding concerns raised.
- Increased expenditure linked with recommendations made by Estyn inspections. |
|---|---|
| 1.05 | **Secondary Schools Reserves**

During the year there has been a general decrease in reserves in the secondary sector. Overall secondary reserves stood at £1.852m - a decrease of £1.637m. This equates to 3.4% of secondary budgets and is a decrease from 7.3% at 31st March 2022.

Table 3 categorises school reserves by number in various percentage brackets.
Table 3 |

No. of Primary Schools	Reserves 31st March 2023	Reserves 31st March 2022
In Deficit Reserves	6	0
Reserves between 0% and 5% of School Budget	17	3
Reserves between 5% and 10% of School Budget	20	7
Reserves between 10% and 15% of School Budget	17	20
Reserves between 15% and 20% of School Budget	2	16
Reserves in excess of 20%	2	18

2 schools out of 11 were in a deficit position compared with 2 the previous year. Deficits amounted to £0.366m compared with £0.745m the previous year. In line with the Protocol for Schools in Financial Difficulty school support and challenge meetings will be continuing with these schools.

In general, the financial resilience of the secondary school sector in Flintshire is still of concern. The total level of reserves across the sector at 3.4% is low.

| 1.06 | **Primary Schools Reserves**

During the year there has been a general decrease in reserves in the primary sector. Overall primary reserves stood at £5.019m, a decrease of £3.427m. This equates to 7.9% of primary budgets, a decrease from 16.2% at 31st March 2022.

Table 4 categorises school reserves by number in various percentage brackets.

Table 4

No. of Primary Schools	Reserves 31st March 2023	Reserves 31st March 2022
In Deficit Reserves	6	0
Reserves between 0% and 5% of School Budget	17	3
Reserves between 5% and 10% of School Budget	20	7
Reserves between 10% and 15% of School Budget	17	20
Reserves between 15% and 20% of School Budget	2	16
Reserves in excess of 20%	2	18
TOTAL	64	64

6 primary schools ended the year with negative reserves compared with none the previous year. 3 of the 6 were small negative balances (that is under £5,000 or 1% of budget) and therefore are not classed as requiring a licensed deficit. The remaining 3 were above that threshold, however licensed deficit applications were not received as required under the Protocol for Schools in Financial Difficulty. The Council has written to all 6 of the governing bodies concerned to remind them of the requirements of the Protocol.

| 1.07 | **2023/24 – Summary of individual schools' budgetary positions**

	The Scheme for Financing Schools requires the governing body of each school to submit a budget plan to the Chief Officer (Education and Youth) by 30th June in each financial year. The Scheme prohibits schools from planning for a deficit when preparing their annual budget plans. Governors have no legal right to set a deficit budget without the consent of the Council and must not presume that such consent will be granted.
	If a school cannot set a balanced budget, to gain approval for a planned deficit, the school must submit a licensed deficit application. The application must accompany the budget plan by the 30th June and be in the format prescribed within the Protocol for Schools In Financial Difficulty. This must be approved by the full governing body and recorded in the minutes. The licensed deficit application should be underpinned by a deficit recovery plan indicating what actions will be taken to bring the financial position back into balance.
	Schools should only apply for a licensed deficit in circumstances where they cannot set a balanced budget without seriously impacting on essential educational provision. Schools must, where possible, avoid the need to apply for a licensed deficit by robustly managing their 3-year budget planning process and being proactive in responding to changes early enough to allow mitigating actions to be implemented.
1.08	The Council set its 2023/24 budget in February 2023, after which individual school funding allocations were released. Following the release of individual school funding allocations, the Council's Finance, HR and School Improvement teams all saw significant increases in activity related to schools seeking support in setting a balanced budget for 2023/24. The challenges schools face include: • On-going impacts of the pandemic on learners, coupled with significant legislative changes from ALNET and a new curriculum serving to increase needs, demands and workloads in schools. • Some schools have seen a steady fall in pupil numbers (over capacity). • High inflation • Reduction in grant funding (compared to previous years) • 3% reduction in the Schools' Budget (after funding pay and energy inflation in full and demographic increases).
1.09	The Council has now received almost all schools budget plans and licensed deficit applications. Plans have been received much earlier from schools than seen in previous years. The challenges schools are facing have resulted in higher levels of redundancies being made in schools than seen for a few years. To date, all activity has been covered by employees volunteering to mitigate compulsory redundancies having to be made. Table 5 below summarises redundancy information across the sectors: **Table 5**

Redundancy Information	Primary	Secondary	Total

Voluntary Redundancies - Teachers (FTE at 31st Aug. 2023)	5	12.8	17.8
Voluntary Redundancies - Non-Teachers (FTE at 31st Aug. 2023)	1.85	2..53	4.38
Total Costs (Redundancy and Pension Strain (£)at 31st Aug. 2023)	£193,976	£537,339	£731,315
Estimated annual savings made as a result (£)	£357,815	£933,155	£1,290,970

There have been no redundancies to date in the specialist sector. The information relates to the 31st August 2023, and is subject to increase if further redundancies are made between 31st August and the end of the financial year. A small number of schools may make voluntary redundancies at 31st December 2023.

Other actions schools have taken to reduce costs include:
- Not renewing fixed term contracts where grant funding has ceased
- Not replacing leavers
- Offering employees opportunities to reduce hours

The Council acknowledges the significant challenges schools are currently facing, and recognises the financial pressures schools, like all council budgets, are experiencing and thanks its headteachers and governing bodies for their work to date in reducing costs under difficult circumstances.

1.10 The Protocol for Schools in Financial Difficulty is intended to act as a mechanism for the Council to provide schools with an appropriate level of challenge and support to help them set a balanced budget or if this is not achievable to prepare a recovery plan that sets out the action the school will take to achieve a sustainable financial position over an agreed period of time.

Table 6 below summarises the licensed deficit information for 2023/24 across the sectors:

Table 6

Licensed Deficit Information	Primary	Secondary	Specialist	Total
No. of schools forecasting a deficit at 31st March 2024	9	5	0	14

No. of schools needing to apply for a licensed deficit	8	2	0	10
Estimated total deficits 31st March 2024 (£)	-£0.3m	-£1.2m	0	-£1.5m
Forecast level of total reserves 31st March 2024 (£)	£2.1m	-£0.3m	£0.2m	£2m
Planned use of reserves during 2023/24	£2.9m	£2.2m	£0.2m	£5.3m

| 1.11 | As reported previously, under the Protocol for Schools in Financial Difficulty, rigorous reviews will take place to fully understand the financial position of each school in deficit.

As part of the response to the Estyn recommendation to manage the reduction in school budget deficits more effectively, additional funding was allocated to secondary schools in 2021/22 for this purpose and initial work was conducted with secondary schools to review the funding formula. The secondary schools in deficit cannot set an in year balanced budget from the resources allocated through the funding formula whilst delivering a broad and balanced curriculum. This elicits the question as to whether the funding formula provides sufficient resource for schools, particularly smaller schools, and those serving our most deprived communities, to operate sustainably. Funding remains in the base budget and the work on the formula continues to ensure every secondary school receives an allocation that allows them to operate sustainably. |
|---|---|
| 1.12 | Demographic changes in the distribution of pupils across the primary and secondary sectors have taken place in recent years, with secondary pupil numbers increasing whilst primary pupil numbers declined. This resulting in a redistribution of funding between sectors. However, this trend is forecast to change with forecast pupil numbers across both sectors decreasing which will have a negative financial impact on the primary and secondary sector going forward. There is concern for the financial resilience of our smaller schools. |

2.00	**RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**
2.01	No direct resource implications as a result of this report.

The impact of high levels of inflation on the financial resilience of schools is an area of concern. |

3.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	As budgets come under increasing pressure from high levels of inflation and reduced financial settlements compared with recent years, there is a risk that more schools will slip into a deficit position. The Schools Accounting Team have developed a risk rating process to identify schools where the financial position is a cause for concern so that they can target their support.
3.02	To balance budgets schools may need to review their employment structures which may result in redundancies.
3.03	Continued pressure on school finances may result in increased class sizes, a reduced curriculum and falling standards.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
4.01	This report has been circulated to all Headteachers and will be reviewed by the School Budget Forum and the Governance and Audit Committee at their September 2023 meetings.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 - School Reserves 2022-23 Appendix 2 – School Reserves Declaration Form 31st March 2023

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None.

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	**Contact Officer:** Liz Thomas, Strategic Finance Manager - Schools **Telephone:** 01352 702289 **E-mail:** **liz.thomas@flintshire.gov.uk**

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	**School Reserves** – Reserves are sums of money that schools carry forward from one year to the next. They arise from underspends and overspends against school allocations over time. Schools are responsible for managing their own finances. The level of reserves held by an individual school will depend on a number of factors. These will include the timing of receipt of income and of payments, and the level of

	contingency fund the school governing body considers appropriate and the particular plans each school has for expenditure.
	Flintshire County Council's Scheme for Financing Schools – The Scheme defines the financial relationship between Flintshire County Council and its maintained schools. The Scheme details the financial management arrangements to which the Authority and its schools are required to adhere. The framework for this Scheme is based on legislative provisions contained in sections 45-53 of the School Standards and Framework Act, 1998 and as further detailed in The School Funding (Wales) Regulations 2010. **Protocol for Schools in Financial Difficulty -** Acts as a mechanism for the Council to provide schools with an appropriate level of challenge and support to help them set a balanced budget or if this is not achievable to prepare a recovery plan that sets out the action the school will take to achieve a sustainable financial position over an agreed period of time.

SCHOOL RESERVES ANALYSIS MARCH 2023

	Primary School	Reserves 31st March 2023	% of Budget	Reserves 31st March 2022	% of Budget
		£		£	
123	BRYNFORD C.P.	34,829	6.8%	74,642	18.6%
125	WESTWOOD C.P.	156,778	13.3%	174,491	19.4%
127	SOUTHDOWN C.P.	202,207	11.7%	246,722	17.4%
129	MOUNTAIN LANE C.P.	235,676	11.9%	335,910	21.2%
134	YSGOL YR ESGOB	62,874	15.2%	70,996	22.5%
135	YSGOL BRO CARMEL	50,500	6.2%	90,438	13.4%
145	YSGOL Y FOEL CILCAIN	5,691	1.9%	32,937	13.1%
151	YSGOL PARC Y LLAN	29,581	4.8%	79,773	15.8%
156	YSGOL BRYN DEVA	38,614	3.1%	109,463	10.4%
159	GOLFTYN CP.	84,036	4.5%	268,814	17.9%
161	WEPRE CP.	12,891	0.9%	125,820	10.1%
162	YSGOL CAE'R NANT	209,455	12.9%	224,176	16.5%
175	DRURY C.P.	52,342	7.3%	66,519	10.9%
181	EWLOE GREEN C.P.	102,925	6.3%	207,744	15.5%
185	YSGOL BRYN GARTH	2,563	0.5%	34,075	8.4%
186	CORNIST PARK CP	19,665	1.6%	128,283	11.9%
187	YSGOL GYMRAEG CROES ATTI	268,051	23.4%	347,207	47.9%
188	YSGOL GWYNEDD C.P.	155,367	7.0%	250,931	13.8%
189	ST.MARY'S	60,532	5.6%	112,563	12.2%
201	YSGOL MAES GLAS	202,109	15.0%	251,120	24.3%
202	GRONANT C.P.	120,682	27.8%	122,110	42.0%
203	YSGOL Y WAUN	73,298	13.6%	70,826	16.4%
204	GWERNYMYNYDD C.P.	30,831	7.7%	34,399	10.2%
209	GWESPYR PICTON (YSGOL MORNANT)	9,185	2.7%	46,228	16.7%
215	HAWARDEN VILLAGE V.A.	131,389	7.4%	178,899	11.9%
218	PENARLAG C.P.	-989	-0.1%	19,830	2.7%
221	YSGOL DERWEN	30,481	3.7%	80,683	11.4%
225	ST.WINEFRIDES	82,923	9.1%	91,470	12.3%
226	YSGOL GWENFFRWD	95,028	11.6%	178,738	27.2%
227	YSGOL ESTYN	14,598	1.5%	72,532	8.7%
245	LEESWOOD C.P.	-11,523	-2.3%	32,393	6.6%
246	LIXWM C.P.	18,163	5.0%	32,336	10.4%
287	YSGOL GLANRAFON	84,033	5.5%	201,977	16.0%
288	YSGOL BRYN COCH	42,592	1.5%	201,187	8.4%
289	YSGOL BRYN GWALIA	89,936	11.1%	155,556	22.7%
291	ST. DAVIDS R.C.	41,264	8.3%	87,421	22.6%
292	BRYN PENNANT C.P.	69,325	9.9%	106,548	20.0%
301	NANNERCH V.P.	880	0.3%	8,008	2.9%
302	NERCWYS V.P.	4,794	1.6%	49,482	21.2%
305	YSGOL OWEN JONES	-224	0.0%	47,510	9.3%
306	NORTHOP HALL C.P.	115,725	12.0%	231,221	32.9%
327	YSGOL PENYFFORDD	168,907	11.4%	206,330	17.2%
331	ST JOHN THE BAPTIST VA SCHOOL	4,327	0.7%	37,425	7.3%
344	QUEENSFERRY C.P.	-2,309	-0.3%	87,300	14.4%
355	RHOS HELYG C.P.	80,290	11.9%	122,006	23.1%
381	ST.ANTHONY'S R.C.	52,445	9.4%	98,413	20.6%
382	SALTNEY FERRY C.P.	112,297	14.1%	125,751	21.4%
383	WOOD MEMORIAL C.P.	30,371	3.9%	76,069	11.8%
384	SANDYCROFT C.P.	108,749	6.9%	182,969	14.5%
385	SEALAND C.P.	152,616	14.9%	195,553	26.8%
386	ST. ETHELWOLD'S	486	0.1%	43,022	9.6%
389	VEN. EDWARD MORGAN R.C.	-48,564	-5.1%	106,657	12.8%
391	YSGOL TY FYNNON	269,436	16.3%	282,905	22.3%
394	SYCHDYN C.P.	-54,685	-8.0%	27,075	4.2%
406	TRELAWNYD V.P.	66,283	14.2%	86,978	23.8%
407	TRELOGAN C.P.	35,993	7.6%	106,590	29.7%
409	YSGOL TERRIG	35,149	7.8%	75,096	23.0%
421	YSGOL Y LLAN WHITFORD	45,908	9.6%	50,801	12.2%
422	ABERMORDDU CP	123,496	13.6%	90,147	11.8%
423	YSGOL GLAN ABER	47,416	6.4%	119,240	19.8%
424	YSGOL MERLLYN	11,897	1.7%	88,100	14.3%
425	BROUGHTON C.P.	230,473	9.2%	328,163	16.3%
426	YSGOL MYNYDD ISA C.P.	321,703	11.8%	402,651	18.1%
428	YSGOL MAES Y FELIN	196,837	12.6%	224,483	17.9%
	PRIMARY - DEFICIT TOTALS	-118,294		0	
	PRIMARY - SURPLUS TOTALS	5,136,893		8,445,703	
	PRIMARY TOTAL	**5,018,600**	**7.9%**	**8,445,703**	**16.2%**

	Secondary School	Reserves 31st March 2023	% of Budget	Reserves 31st March 2022	% of Budget
503	ELFED HIGH SCHOOL	153,166	2.9%	426,936	9.5%
509	CONNAHS QUAY HIGH SCHOOL	661,992	10.3%	881,387	16.9%
515	FLINT HIGH SCHOOL	326,335	6.7%	455,925	11.0%
517	ST RICHARD GWYN CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL	18,442	0.4%	93,749	2.4%
521	HAWARDEN HIGH SCHOOL	60,645	1.0%	348,978	6.5%
523	YSGOL TREFFYNNON	-319,403	-11.0%	-393,791	-13.6%
525	CASTELL ALUN HIGH SCHOOL	264,171	3.7%	778,746	13.0%
529	ALUN SCHOOL	49,893	0.6%	431,819	6.1%
531	YSGOL MAES GARMON	291,379	8.3%	167,360	5.4%
533	ARGOED SCHOOL	391,795	10.0%	649,227	20.6%
551	ST DAVIDS HIGH SCHOOL	-46,714	-2.2%	-351,456	-14.8%
	SECONDARY - DEFICIT TOTALS	-366,117		-745,247	
	SECONDARY - SURPLUS TOTALS	2,217,816		4,234,126	
	SECONDARY TOTAL	**1,851,699**	**3.4%**	**3,488,879**	**7.3%**

	Specialist School	Reserves 31st March 2023	% of Budget	Reserves 31st March 2022	% of Budget
601	YSGOL PEN COCH	199,787	8.2%	248,147	12.3%
602	YSGOL MAES HYFRYD	172,957	6.3%	372,183	17.0%
	SPECIALIST TOTAL	**372,744**	**7.2%**	**620,330**	**14.7%**

	GRAND TOTAL	**7,243,043**	**5.9%**	**12,554,912**	**12.1%**

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Flintshire County Council
School Reserves Declaration Form
(As at 31st March 2023)

Sir y Fflint
Flintshire

Please return your signed form to your school's Finance Officer by no later than **30th June 2023**

111	SCHOOL X

The School Funding (Wales) Regulations 2010 requires:

A statement as to the use that a governing body proposes to make of a surplus in the school balance which exceeds 5% of the school budget share or £10,000, whichever is the greater.

A provision under which
(a)an authority may direct the governing body as to how to spend a surplus in the school balance for a funding period, if
    (i)in the case of a primary school the surplus is £50,000 or more, and
    (ii)in the case of a secondary school or a special school the surplus is £100,000 or more;
(b)the authority may, if the governing body do not comply with such a direction, require the governing body to pay all or part of that surplus to the authority to be applied as part of their schools budget for the funding period in question.

School Reserve Information - 31st March 2023

	£		£
School Reserve at 31st March 2023	100,000	Includes ICT HwB reserve of	2,000

	£
5% of 2022/23 School Budget Share	75,000

	£
Greater of £10,000 or 5% of School Budget Share	75,000

Level of School Reserve above WG guidelines	25,000

Please outline the reasons for exceeding WG guidelines below

Please continue on a separate sheet as necessary

29/3/2018

Please outline below the planned use of reserves to bring reserves back in line with WG guidelines

	Financial Year 2023/24 £	Financial Year 2024/25 £	Financial Year 2025/26 £
Balancing budget i.e. maintaining school spending plan at a higher level than funding allocation			
Employee related			
Premises related			
ICT related			
Resources related			
Other - please specify			
Other - please specify			
Other - please specify			
Other - please specify			
Other - please specify			
Other - please specify			
Other - please specify			
Projected School Reserve at Financial Year End	**100,000**	**100,000**	**100,000**

Please use the space below to include a narrative to accompany the figures above

Please continue on a separate sheet as necessary

Please use the space below to include any other comments relevant to school reserves

Please continue on a separate sheet as necessary

Signatures

Headteacher

Chair of Governors

Scrutinising carefully the level of reserves each school holds is part of the Council's role in monitoring the management of school budgets. Schools with excessive reserves, that are consistently above the prescribed limits, will be required to invite the Strategic Finance Manager for Schools to a meeting of the governing body to discuss their school's reserve.

29/3/2018

CYNGOR Sir y Fflint Flintshire COUNTY COUNCIL

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday 14th September 2023
Report Subject	Self-Evaluation Report Education Services 2022-23
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture & Leisure
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Education and Youth Portfolio undertakes a rigorous annual self-evaluation of its performance and services to provide assurance to the Council on the quality of education services in Flintshire. The report identifies strengths and areas for further improvement and those areas for improvement are then reflected in the Council Improvement Plan and the Portfolio's own Business Plan.

With the resumption of all inspection activity by Estyn from April 2022 onwards, the Portfolio's evaluation report this year reports against the Estyn framework for Local Government Education Services. The report is structured to provide assurance to the Council across the three inspection areas of:

- Outcomes
- Quality of Education Services (including Youth Services)
- Leadership and Management

Each inspection area is evaluated in detail for the period 2022-2023 and concludes with a summary of further areas identified for improvement to ensure the continued provision of quality education services to the residents of Flintshire. The report also contains a summary of progress against the four recommendations from the Estyn inspection of Flintshire's Education Services in 2019.

The overall conclusion of the self-evaluation report is that education services in Flintshire are strong, effectively support children and young people and provide good value for money.

	RECOMMENDATIONS
1	To review the outcome of the Education Portfolio's annual self-evaluation report on the quality of education services for the period 2022-2023.
2	To provide any observations to the Portfolio Team on the report.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE SELF EVALUATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATION SERVICES
1.01	The prime purpose of self-evaluation is to lead service improvements within the Education and Youth Portfolio to secure the best possible outcomes for children and young people. Only by robustly evaluating the strengths of the current provision and identifying areas for further improvement can the portfolio continue to refine the way it delivers services to secure better outcomes. At the heart of self-evaluation are three questions: • How well are we doing and what impact are our services having? • How do we know? • How can we improve things further?
1.02	The current Estyn framework for the inspection of Local Authority Education Services was introduced in 2018. It focuses on three inspection areas: **1. Outcomes** 1.1 Standards and progress overall 1.2 Standards and progress of specific groups 1.3 Wellbeing and attitudes to learning **2. Quality of Education Services** 2.1 Support for School Improvement 2.2 Support for Vulnerable Learners 2.3 Other education support services **3. Leadership & Management** 3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers 3.2 Self-evaluation and improvement planning 3.3 Professional learning 3.4 Safeguarding arrangements 3.5 Use of resources The portfolio's self-evaluation report is structured in this way.
1.03	The inspection programme of Local Authority Education Services began in 2018 and Estyn will complete the cycle of inspecting all local authorities by

	the summer of 2024. A new inspection framework is currently in development and will be introduced from the Autumn Term of 2024.
1.04	Education services in Flintshire were inspected under the current framework in June 2019. The report was positive and there was no requirement for any Estyn follow up. The report identified four recommendations for improvement which the service has continued to focus on since 2019, despite the interruptions and impacts caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. These recommendations are embedded in the Council Plan and Portfolio Business Plan. The recommendations were: R1 Improve outcomes for learners in key stage 4 R2 Reduce exclusions and increase attendance in both primary and secondary schools R3 Improve the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the few front line education services identified in the report in order to provide more accurate information about the impact of the local authority's work R4 Manage the reduction in school budget deficits more effectively
1.05	The suspension of learner assessments, public examinations as well as other data collections by Welsh Government during the pandemic and its decision not to collect and report on pupil assessment data below the national level has resulted in many of the key performance indicators by which the portfolio traditionally measured its progress and referenced in its annual self-evaluation report now not being available. The focus is now on schools using their own performance data to drive improvements for all their learners at an individual level. The role of the local authority's education service and the regional school improvement service is to rigorously challenge schools and provide targeted support where needed to ensure that schools are using their own evaluation processes effectively to continuously improve and by doing so, secure pupil progress and improved outcomes for all.
1.06	Section 1 of this self-evaluation report describes the portfolio's current view of 'outcomes' within this context. It uses evidence from Estyn reports on its schools. It is also based on first-hand evidence of working closely with school leaders and reviewing every individual school in Flintshire with the school improvement advisers from the regional school improvement service, GwE. Section 2 provides a detailed overview of the range of education services within Flintshire and how they contribute to securing positive pupil outcomes in terms of academic achievement and learner wellbeing. Section 3 provides an evaluation of the quality of the leadership and management of education services at a whole council level as well as specifically within the Education and Youth portfolio.
1.07	The full self-evaluation report is included at Appendix 1.

2.00	**RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**
2.01	There are no revenue or capital resource implications as a result of this report.

3.00	**IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT**
3.01	The Education Portfolio has a detailed risk assessment document which outlines the key risks related to the delivery of education services. It is regularly reviewed by the Portfolio's Senior Management Team and is regularly reported to the appropriate Council committee.

4.00	**CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT**
4.01	N/A for this report.

5.00	**APPENDICES**
5.01	Appendix 1 – Self Evaluation Report Education Services 2022-23

6.00	**LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**
6.01	Estyn Report Flintshire Education Services 2019 https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2021-08/Inspection%20report%20Flintshire%20County%20Council%202019.pdf Estyn Framework for the Inspection of Local Government Education Services 2021 https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2021-11/What%20we%20inspect%20-%20Local%20government%20education%20services%20for%20inspections%20from%202021.pdf

7.00	**CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS**
7.01	**Contact Officer:** Claire Homard, Chief Officer Education & Youth **Telephone:** 01352 704190 **E-mail:** claire.homard@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	**GLOSSARY OF TERMS**
8.01	**Estyn** – the Education and Training Inspectorate for Wales.

	GwE – Regional School Improvement Services for the 6 Education Authorities of the North Wales region. **SEREN** – Welsh Government programme for the most able students to improve access to Oxford, Cambridge and Russell Group universities.

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Education & Youth Portfolio

Self-Evaluation Report of Education Services

2022 - 2023

CYNGOR
Sir y Fflint
Flintshire
COUNTY COUNCIL

Introduction & Local Context – Flintshire County Council

Formed in 1996 following local government reorganisation, Flintshire is a well governed and high performing unitary local authority in the northeast corner of Wales bordering Cheshire, Wrexham and Denbighshire. Flintshire has a strong track record of being a direct provider of local services from Education, Social Care, Streetscene and Housing. Whilst direct provision is at the core of its model, Flintshire is also a creative and flexible council and operates both as a provider and a commissioner of services. It has been instrumental in developing collaborative arrangements such as a regional school improvement service, an employee-owned mutual in leisure, libraries and cultural services, catering and cleaning services and a local social housing trading company. Over the last few years, the Council has also developed its own residential care for children in order to provide high quality, local provision to meet growing demand in a more cost effective way. Continuing to develop sustainable models of delivery and maintaining high quality services continues to be a priority for the Council, particularly in challenging financial times, to secure the best outcomes for its residents and value for money for the public purse.

Flintshire provides local public services for 155,100 people who live in 66,973 households. It has the largest population of the North Wales authorities and is the seventh largest in Wales. The population is expected to rise by 2.1% by 2028 but this reflects more of an increase in the number of people over the age of 65 as the numbers of children, young people and the working population are predicted to decrease. In the 2021 census the number of children aged under 15 years decreased by 4.2% and the proportion of people aged 65+ increased to 21.4% (33,200 people) compared to 17.6% (26.836 people) in 2011. This will obviously impact on future demands for services in different ways.

With just over 6,000 staff, the Council is one of the two largest employers in the county, alongside Airbus, and provides direct services including, education, housing, planning, refuse collection, environmental health, recycling, roads, social services, trading standards, transport and tourism. It provides leisure, library and catering/cleaning services via 'arms' length' trading companies. Flintshire has seven libraries, ten sports and leisure centres, two country parks and maintains 733 miles of roads.

Flintshire has 78 schools (64 Primary, 11 Secondary, 2 Specialist & 1 PRU) providing education for 23,314 pupils, including those educated other than at school.

Manufacturing, retail trade and human health and social work are the sectors which currently employ the most people in Flintshire. The availability of employment is rising and unemployment in Flintshire in February 2023 stood at 3.0%, better than the Welsh average of 3.8%. The COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit will, however, have implications for the local economy and the population in the short, medium and long term. The North Wales Economic Framework, supported by UK, Welsh Government and Local Government funding streams provides a clear strategy for future economic growth and clearly articulates the skills and knowledge that will be needed within the local and regional population to deliver on emerging economic, social, digital, and wellbeing priorities.

The County has a mix of affluent and deprived areas. Due to the interconnections of factors, there are particular communities that are more vulnerable than others in Flintshire. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2019 highlights that coastal communities in Flintshire experience high levels of deprivation (3.3% of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) in 10% most deprived; 10.9% in 20% most deprived in Wales), particularly when it comes to the employment, income, education, and community safety dimensions.

The number of school aged pupils entitled to Free School Meals (e-FSM) has decreased from 20.41% in 2022 (Wales 2022 average 23%) to 14.08% in 2023. This figure is a significant shift away from

current Welsh averages and is linked to the Council being an early implementer of Universal Credit (UC). Families below the income threshold for Universal Credit are entitled to a free school meal but when earnings rise and exceed the UC threshold, the child continues to receive a free meal under Transitional Protection until that phase of the child's education ends. The Council does not receive any funding for pupils on Transitional Protection but is still required to make the provision of a meal. The reduction in the overall percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals will have a significant impact on funding streams to the Council and to schools as this is the measure of deprivation used in many budget formulae. Since 2019 the percentage of Flintshire children on Transitional Protection has increased from 0% to 39% so represents a growing risk to funding for education.

Based on the 2021 Annual Population Survey, the Welsh language is spoken by 23.9% of the population in Flintshire compared to 29.5% across Wales. This is a significant increase from the 2011 national census which reported 13.2% of the county's population having some Welsh language skills. The county has 5 Welsh medium primary schools and 1 Welsh medium secondary school. There are no dual stream or bilingual schools in Flintshire. Currently 6.34% of children in Flintshire are educated through the medium of Welsh. There are ambitious targets in the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan to more than double this number over the next ten years.

The county also has a mixed provision of faith-based education with 8 Church in Wales Voluntary Aided primary schools, 5 Roman Catholic primary schools and 1 Roman Catholic secondary school. 11.35% of children in Flintshire currently receive their education in a faith-based setting.

Flintshire has a strong tradition of supporting a local infrastructure of non-maintained early years' provision through both English and Welsh, which supports the Council in its delivery of childcare and early years' education. Flintshire was an early adopter of the Welsh Government's flagship childcare policy of 30 hours free provision for working parents and there is a strong network of childminders, playgroups and private day nurseries delivering this combination of childcare and early education prior to children transitioning into schools. Flintshire Council also supports neighbouring local authorities with the administration of their Childcare Offer.

Overall, 12.06% of school aged pupils in Flintshire in 2023 are designated as having a Special Educational Need. Of this number 2.74% have a Statement of Special Educational Need, higher than the Welsh average of 2%. 4.88% of pupils are designated as School Action which is lower than the Welsh average of 7.3% and 3.05% are at School Action Plus, lower than the Welsh average of 6.1%. Under the new legislation in Wales for Additional Learning Needs, there are also Individual Development Plans (IDP) in place which can be school maintained or Local Authority maintained. In Flintshire 1.39% of learners have an IDP which is higher than the Welsh average of 0.7%.

The current Chief Executive, Neal Cockerton, was appointed in November 2021 and was previously a member of the Council's Chief Officer Team. The Chief Officer for Education and Youth, Claire Homard, was appointed in June 2017, initially as Interim Chief Officer and then permanently in 2018. She also fulfils the role as Statutory Director of Education for the Council. The Leader of the Council is Cllr Ian Roberts, who up until May 2023 also held the role of Cabinet Member for Education, Youth? and the Welsh Language. Since May 2023, Cllr Mared Eastwood has taken on this responsibility. The Chair of the Education, Youth & Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee is Cllr Teresa Carberry.

<u>Structure of the Council</u>

Flintshire County Council has 67 Councillors that are normally democratically elected at least every four years. After the elections of May 2022 there is a minority Labour administration with informal support from the Liberal Democrats.

The political make up of Flintshire County Council elected members from May 2022 is as follows: Labour: 31; Independent: 26; Liberal Democrats: 4; Eagle Group: 3; Conservative: 2; Non-Aligned: 1.

The Council has a Cabinet and a Scrutiny function. Decisions are usually made by the Cabinet for all issues including major policy matters. The role of Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to hold the Cabinet to account and to assist in the improvement and development of the Council's policies and services. Flintshire has 5 Overview and Scrutiny Committees:

- Education, Youth & Culture
- Corporate Resources
- Community & Housing
- Environment & Economy
- Social and Health Care

There are several other Committees that are appointed by Council at its Annual Meeting to ensure that all other functions are discharged, including: Appeals; Clwyd Pension Fund; Constitution and Democratic Services; Governance and Audit; Grievance; Grievance Appeals; Investigation and Disciplinary; Joint Governance (for pensions); and Licensing. There is a detailed Constitution that describes the various parts that make up the Council, their functions, membership and procedural rules.

Cllr Mared Eastwood	**Neal Cockerton**	**Claire Homard**
Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Leisure & Culture	**Chief Executive**	**Chief Officer Education & Youth**

Working in Partnership

Flintshire County Council has a longstanding and proud track record of partnership working. The communities it serves rightly expect statutory and third sector partners to work together to manage shared priorities through collaboration. The Council works within the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and its sustainable development principles. Flintshire has a joint Public Service Board with Wrexham County Borough Council as it was acknowledged that by joining together, knowledge and resources could be shared and joint solutions found to tackle common challenges, specifically those around community resilience and COVID-19 recovery. This Joint PSB was formed in June 2020. The objectives of the Flintshire and Wrexham Public Service Board are:

- Build flourishing communities by reducing inequalities across environment, education, employment, income and housing.

- Improve community well-being by enabling people of all ages to live safe, healthy and independent lives.

The focused outcomes of the PSB Plan relate to Children and Young People, Our Communities and Where we work.

https://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/PDFFiles/Policy-and-Performance/PSB/Flintshire-and-Wrexham-Public-Services-Board-Well-being-Plan-2023-2028.pdf

Public Services Board partners include: Wrexham County Borough Council, Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, Public Health Wales, North Wales Police, North Wales Fire and Rescue Service, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, HM Prison and Probation Service in Wales, Flintshire Local Voluntary Council, Association of Voluntary Organisations in Wrexham, Coleg Cambria, Wrexham Glyndwr University, Do Well Ltd, NE Wales MIND and the Department for Work & Pensions.

Flintshire's Corporate Plan April 2022- March 2023

The Council Improvement Plan is reviewed and refreshed each year and approved by full Council. In the reporting period April 2022- March 2023, the following core improvement themes drove the business plans of each portfolio and were reported on via quarterly monitoring reports, culminating in an Annual Performance Report.

Theme / Wellbeing Objective	In-year Priority
Poverty Protecting people from poverty by supporting them to meet their basic needs	Income Poverty
	Child Poverty
	Food Poverty
	Fuel Poverty
	Digital Poverty
Affordable and Accessible Housing Housing in Flintshire meeting the needs of our residents and supporting safer communities	Housing support and homeless prevention
	Housing Needs and Housing Options
	Social Housing
	Private Rented Sector
	Empty Properties
Green Society and Environment Limiting the impact of the Council's services on the natural environment and supporting the wider communities of Flintshire to reduce their own carbon footprint	Carbon Neutrality
	Climate Change and Adaption
	Fleet Strategy
	Green Access
	Green Environment
	Renewable Energy
	Active and Sustainable Travel Options
	Circular Economy
Economy Enabling a sustainable economic recovery	Town Centre Regeneration
	Business
	Transport Connectivity
	Digital Infrastructure
	Local Development Plan (LDP) Targets
	Spending Money for the benefit of Flintshire
	Reducing worklessness
Personal and Community Well-Being Supporting people in need to live as well as they can	Independent Living
	Safeguarding
	Direct Provision to support people closer to home
	Local Dementia Strategy
	A well-connected safe and clean local environment
Education and Skills Enabling and supporting learning communities	Educational Engagement and Achievement
	Digital Learning Opportunities
	Learning Environments
	Learning Community Networks
	Specialist Educational Provision
	Welsh in Education Strategic Plan
	Wellbeing

Review of Estyn Recommendations from Local Government of Education Services Inspection (June 2019)

The Council's Education Services were last inspected by Estyn in June 2019 under the Local Government Education Services Framework. The outcome was a positive report and no requirement for any kind of follow up. The recommendations from the report were as follows and are embedded in business plans for the Council and the Education & Youth Portfolio:

R1 Improve outcomes for learners in key stage 4

R2 Reduce exclusions and increase attendance in both primary and secondary schools

R3 Improve the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the few front line education services identified in the report in order to provide more accurate information about the impact of the local authority's work

R4 Manage the reduction in school budget deficits more effectively

Post Inspection Action Plan - Estyn LGES Recommendations Evaluation 22-23

Officer	Evaluation of Key Actions	RAYG
	R1: Improve outcomes for learners in KS4	-
VB	***Liaise effectively with GwE and Update level 2 Business Plan with GwE for 2022-2023*** The level 2 Business Plan was completed for primary, special and secondary schools during summer term 2022. Progress was monitored through regular meetings with GwE officers. The plan included identified regional priorities, a comprehensive support plan for schools and a wide range of professional development opportunities. Evaluation of the plan fed into the new GwE Regional Business Plan. This spans a three-year period between 2023-2026 which also contains a detailed 12-month Business Plan for 2023-2024. The priorities continue to be focused on a combination of improving school provision, leadership and outcomes, as well as delivering The Reform Journey and Curriculum for Wales.	(green)
VB	***Ensure all secondary school support plans are updated and include a focus on KS4 provision and outcomes*** All secondary school support plans were completed by Supporting Improvement Advisers in discussion with schools. These plans are live documents and kept under review. One secondary school plan was revised to meet the statutory requirements of a post inspection action plan following the school being placed in Significant Improvement in January 2023. This plan has been approved by Estyn.	(green)
VB	***Review the 14-19 curriculum offer for KS4 learners and update 14-16 and post-16 strategies*** New terms of reference have been developed for the Curriculum Deputies Group and they have continued to meet on a termly basis. Schools have shared their curriculum models and	(yellow)

	continue to share expertise when looking at future requirements in light of the new curriculum and also the review of KS4 qualifications. Focused discussion and research has taken place with post-16 schools and their learners in light of the forthcoming major changes from the introduction of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER). The priority is ensuring continued excellent partnership working and strategic planning for Flintshire's post-16 sector. **The Flintshire Post-16 Network** was re-established following the pandemic to ensure all post-16 learners have the very best opportunities and outcomes. The network consists of headteachers from schools with sixth forms and a representative from Coleg Cambria. The network is divided into a Provider Group (all providers) and Core Group (schools with sixth forms). The Provider Group exists to provide strategic direction and local support and monitoring for Post-16 provision in Flintshire. The Post 16 Learning Adviser has met with Headteachers with sixth forms to evaluate current provision and assess future need. Work is currently underway on refreshing the Post-16 strategy. The focus remains on: • Ensuring sufficient access to high quality and relevant education for all, including ALN students • Providing an offer that meets all needs including the needs of students and wider economic and employment needs • Building on strong reputations and specialisms within school sixth form provision • Ensuring Post-16 provision is sustainable, resilient, and efficient and delivers maximum value	
VB	***Review the pre SEREN and SEREN activity offer for learners in Flintshire*** WG did not collect the data for SEREN for 2020 due to the pandemic. In 2022, 67% of students in Flintshire schools sixth form provision gained a place at a Russell Group University. This is an increase on 2021 when 60% gained a place. Nearly all other students took up a place at other universities or on specialist courses. It may be that some students also achieved places at Russell Group Universities but didn't register for SEREN. Some students will also have accessed SEREN provision through the Deeside Sixth provision provided by Coleg Cambria.	
VB	***Work effectively across the service to ensure high standards of school performance and learner outcomes through support and challenge*** As a result of changes to the assessment and accountability framework for schools, schools are not required to undertake or record final assessments at FP, KS2. There is no comparative data for school performance measures at Key Stage 4 for 2022 examinations. Estyn resumed inspections for schools from April 2022. Inspections in the school sector began again in summer term 2022, with 15 Flintshire primary schools, 2 Flintshire secondary schools and the Portfolio Pupil Referral Unit (PPRU), inspected to date. Inspection performance across the school sectors overall is generally strong. One primary school and one secondary school are in the statutory category of 'In Need of Significant Improvement' and the PPRU and one secondary school are in Estyn Review. In nearly all cases, there is a strong record of close correlation between the Council's pre-inspection reports and Estyn findings. The Council has a very good track record in effectively supporting schools to be swiftly removed from Estyn categories. Powers of intervention, including the use of Warning Notices are used effectively where schools cause concern, to ensure challenge and support is timely and effective. Interim Executive Boards have provided successful challenge and intervention to schools in serious categories of concern.	

| | This has helped to increase the pace of change and ensure robust accountability for standards and progress.

The primary school inspection profile for Flintshire has been continuously strong. Between April 2022 and July 2023, 15 primary schools in Flintshire were inspected. Judgements are no longer given by Estyn for the five inspection areas but 93% of those schools inspected required no follow up by Estyn and five schools were invited to prepare a case study for Estyn which is an indicator of highly effective practice. One primary school was placed in the statutory category of 'In Need of Significant Improvement' in September 2022. A comprehensive package of support provided by the LA and GwE is in place for the school. There are no primary schools in the statutory category of Special Measures or in Estyn Review.

Overall, the inspection profile for Flintshire secondary schools is satisfactory. Of the 11 secondary schools in the local authority, one is in the statutory category of 'In Need of Significant Improvement. One other secondary school is in the non-statutory category of Estyn Review. Both schools were inspected during this academic year. No secondary school is in the statutory category of Special Measures. The two schools that were previously in Estyn Review were successfully removed from follow up in 2022. All secondary schools have bespoke support plans in place to ensure continued improvement. Schools causing concern are subject to robust monitoring. There are 360° action plans in place when needed and highly focused support provided by both the Regional School Improvement Service, GwE and the Local Authority.

The inspection profile for Flintshire non maintained settings is strong. Seven settings were inspected during the 2022-23 academic year. There are currently no registered non-maintained EE providers in a follow up inspection category. A very small number of settings have been placed in Estyn Review or Focused Improvement over the last five years and the LA has demonstrated a positive track record in supporting these settings to be removed quickly. | |
|---|---|---|
| **VB** | ***Support the ongoing development of schools as learning organisations through the Alliance model***

All Flintshire Secondary schools are involved in the Alliance model. | |
| **VB** | ***Hold schools effectively to account for their performance through SPMG meetings where required***

As a result of national changes, there was a need to review how schools are identified as requiring monitoring by the School Performance Monitoring Group (SPMG) . This has been part of the national and regional discussions on evolving regional processes to support schools on their self-improvement journey. Engagement with schools should facilitate the early identification of schools that are in need of support, to prevent them becoming a school causing concern.

The criteria for identifying schools requiring monitoring was previously based on two main factors – those schools which were categorised as being in an Amber or Red support category by the local authority & GwE, as part of the national categorisation model, and those in an Estyn follow up category i.e. Estyn Review or the statutory categories of Significant Improvement or Special Measures. The Welsh Government suspended school categorisation for the 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022 academic years, as part of its measures to reduce pressure on schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Regional consortia and local authorities continued to work in partnership | |

	with schools to help provide them with the support they need to improve and to successfully implement reforms. In the summer term of 2022, the Welsh Government published a new school improvement framework, ensuring that learner progression and well-being is at the heart of all efforts to deliver high standards and aspirations. This means that National Categorisation has finished and will be replaced by a robust self-evaluation system where good practice can be shared and failure is urgently addressed. Since 2019, 3 primary schools and 3 secondary schools have been subject to monitoring by the SPMG. The challenges of the pandemic have resulted in understandable delays to the process as schools focused on firstly providing emergency childcare in the first period of lockdown and then subsequent periods of remote learning. At the end of the spring term 2023, there were 2 primary and 2 secondary schools under monitoring by the SPMG. The small number of schools reflects the very positive Estyn profile for schools in Flintshire. Through the work of the SPMG, members and officers have reflected that the process continues to be effective in contributing to an improvement in primary and secondary school outcomes over time, particularly in schools where there are significant and long-term challenges. When Estyn inspected the local authority in the summer of 2019, they recognised that the portfolio's arrangements for identifying schools causing concern work well, and in most cases lead to effective actions. The inspection identified that *"Officers and elected members in Flintshire know their schools and settings well and can outline clearly the relative strengths and areas for improvement. They recognise specific issues facing individual schools causing concern and act in a timely way to put in place the most appropriate support in collaboration with GwE".*	
R2: Reduce exclusions and increase attendance in both primary and secondary schools		
JW/ CS	***Amendments to the Exclusions Policy / Substance misuse policy to promote the use of diversionary options for young people at risk of exclusion*** Work has been underway to update the draft policy following consultation with Flintshire Sorted. However, progress has been delayed due to awaiting national guidance (Whole School Smoke Free Wales). However, in the last 12 months the Senior Management Team and Programme Board have had an opportunity to review the policy and we intend to progress to consultation with the Head Teachers Federation in the Autumn Term.	
JW	***Development of diversionary activities for young people at risk of exclusion through substance misuse or anti-social behaviour*** A draft 5 day programme has been devised and has been tested in 2021 with a small cohort of young people who were at risk of exclusion. The pilot has allowed for amendments to the programme. However, the programme has not been extended further due to delays in agreeing an overarching policy and due to capacity within the Sorted Education Practitioner team.	
JW	***Application through the Youth Endowment Fund for a Regional Youth Violence and Exploitation Prevention Officers and secure pathways for support for young people at risk of exploitation.***	

	A regional YJS bid was submitted in 2021 to enable all 4 YJS areas to recruit Youth Violence and Exploitation Prevention Officers utilising resilience interventions developed as part of a PhD study completed within Gwynedd & Ynys Mon. Whilst we were successful in the early stages of our bid, we did not proceed to the final round and did not receive funding for the project. Other funding streams are currently being explored.	
JW	***Implement any actions resulting from Extended Learning Reviews*** The YJS continues to operate a local Community Safeguarding and Public Protection Framework in addition to the mandated framework from the Youth Justice Board. In the last 12 months we have undertaken 2 Extended Learning Reviews within the multi-agency partnership. All actions form part of an ongoing Action Plan which is monitored through the YJS Delivery Group and Executive Management Board.	
JR	***Complete the review of the Education Welfare Service (EWS) to ensure delivery model offers support and challenge to schools/parents and utilises all relevant data to inform and improve practice*** A revised model of delivery has been implemented across the EWS. The service now comprises of Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) and Education Support Officers (ESOs). EWOs are targeted at secondary schools along with safeguarding matters and more complex cases whilst ESOs work predominantly alongside the primary sector. There are designated ESOs who also work in the areas of Fixed Penalty Notices, Elective Home Education and Children Missing Education. Attendance and exclusion data is generated on a half-termly basis. The data is used by the EWS to identify schools where attendance is below the expected level and target resources to support an improvement. Despite the overall depressed levels of attendance both locally and nationally, there has been improvement in those schools where there has been targeted intervention and support. The data is shared on a wider service basis to support multi-service intervention, e.g. with regards to Traveller pupil attendance. Particular pupil cohorts have also been targeted, e.g. Year 6 /7 transition for pupils with below 85% attendance. This was piloted with a particular school and is planned to be rolled out across all secondary schools in the next academic year. Individual pupil exclusion levels are monitored to identify those where intervention is required to prevent escalation to permanent exclusion. It is difficult to see the impact of the actions given that levels of attendance remain below pre-pandemic levels and instances of exclusion continue to rise. This is widely attributed to the legacy of the Covid pandemic and services continue to review their actions to maximize impact.	
JR	***Review the pilot Partnership work with secondary schools to inform and develop this model of engagement to improve attendance*** Partnership work is continuing with identified schools. The Welsh Government initiative - Community Focused Schools (CFS) - is in its first year of implementation using the allocated grant funding and this is being used to enhance the partnership working in the designated areas of Saltney, Holywell and Queensferry. A Community Hub has been established in one of the secondary schools to facilitate greater collaboration.	
JR	***Working with schools to support development and implementation of flexible and bespoke educational packages to improve attendance and engagement***	

	Funding has been directed to schools this year instead of being retained by the Council to support the implementation of flexible educational packages for their pupils. Schools have collaborated in some instances to commission specific courses of interest for groups of pupils or used funding for individuals to increase their levels of engagement. Levels of attendance remain lower than pre-pandemic but access to the direct funding has enabled schools to make provision decisions based on the needs of their particular pupils.	
JR	***Utilise the statutory tools and approaches to support an improvement in attendance*** The use of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) was resumed in September 2022 following WG guidance. A designated officer within the Education Welfare Service oversees this process and schools are being supported to implement this approach to challenge and improve attendance as appropriate. Instances of non-payment are being followed up and has resulted in prosecution. The impact of implementing FPNs is limited to date given the short period of implementation and the complex nature of the cases taken forward at this point. It is anticipated that with the publicity around the outcomes of court cases in particular, parents will have a greater appreciation of the importance of school attendance and the levels to which schools and the Council will go to, to secure an improvement in engagement.	
JR	***Improving awareness of trauma informed practice with schools and Education and Youth workforce*** Training on Trauma Informed Practice was delivered by Dr Carol Harper through Trauma Informed Schools to 18 delegates from the Education and Youth Portfolio including Chief Officer, Senior Managers, Service Managers, Head Teachers and Senior School Leads. The YJS (Youth Justice Service) has also accessed additional training for 5 practitioners through the Trauma Recovery Model Academy on Trauma Informed Practice. The Senior Manager for Youth Justice has also presented at Education and Youth Portfolio Meetings on progress being made on our Trauma and ACE (TrACE) development plan.	
R3: Improve the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the few front line education services identified in the report in order to provide more accurate information about the impact of the local authority's work		
JW	***Improved monitoring for YJS Cohort excluded from education or not accessing education provision*** All children and young people referred to YJS are subject to a Triage Assessment by our Education Officer. Any young person not receiving their full entitlement of ETE is discussed as part of our monthly ETE Panel and plans to address exclusion and attendance are discussed between YJS and Inclusion Service. The YJS is a standing member on the EOTAS Panel which helps to escalate cases of concern or persistent non-engagement. The introduction of new Key Performance Indicators will require additional oversight of our cohort through our Management Board.	
DMT	***Identify datasets for use as Portfolio/services within evaluation processes*** School Workforce Annual Census (SWAC) data for Welsh – protocol currently being developed between the Workforce Sub-group of the Welsh Education Strategic Forum and the School Management Information Team (SMIT). Information will be used to develop the forward work programme for this group each year, linked to the 10 year Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). The focus is to effectively target professional development for the Welsh language	

	with staff in schools to improve the quality of teaching of Welsh in schools and increase the numbers of staff who are competent and confident in their use of Welsh. Core attendance and exclusion data is now generated on a half-termly basis and shared across all managers in the Education Portfolio to support targeted intervention in schools.	
JR	***Ensure appropriate monitoring systems and tools are in place to support evaluation and intervention in identified services*** Services have been supported to review the data available to them and the relevance of this in monitoring and evaluating service impact. The importance of this has been promoted through management meetings and there is evidence of improvement in this area through service self-evaluation documentation. The shift away from producing nationally published data has impacted on this process and required mangers to really consider their purpose and the information which will demonstrate the impact of their services. This is an evolving process with managers and teams being at different stages in their development of embedding processes and continues to be a priority.	
VB	***Review of local authority quality board meetings with GwE – new model for implementation from September 2021*** Review has been completed. An additional series of meetings was added to discuss all phase items with a particular focus on 360° support plans. GwE provide administrative support for these meetings and for the secondary phase meetings. The LA continues to provide administrative support for the primary phase meetings. The revised model is now well embedded and will continue for the 2023 -2024 academic year.	
R4: Manage the reduction in school budget deficits more effectively		
VB LT	***Ensure there is close monitoring of primary schools where budgets place them at risk of financial deficit without prior action*** This is a now regular agenda item at Portfolio Finance Meetings. Detailed analysis has been completed by the schools' Finance Team to RAG schools' risk level over the medium term. The significant number of grant streams for schools during the last 18 months has added to the complexity of budget forecasting and so, as appropriate when supporting individual schools, analysis has been completed with and without grant funding expenditure to highlight over reliance on temporary funding sources to individual schools. The Senior Primary Learning Adviser has been working closely with those schools identified at increased risk to support them e.g. in the review of planning for class sizes and curriculum provision. Headteachers have been supported where required, including with specialist HR advice, to make appropriate and timely decisions to avoid financial deficit. The financial landscape continues to deteriorate generally for the Council, and this resulted in a 3% reduction to schools' delegated budgets for the 23-24 financial year. The impact of this is that more schools will face significant challenges in setting a balanced budget in the year ahead and school balances, which have previously provided a level of protection, are significantly reducing. At the closedown of accounts 8 schools finished the 22-23 year in a deficit position. 2 Secondary and 6 Primary (3 of the 6 were small negative balances (that is under £5,000 or 1% of budget) and therefore are not classed as requiring a licensed deficit. The remaining 3 were above that threshold, however licensed deficit applications were not received as required under the Protocol for Schools in Financial Difficulty. The council has written to all 6 of the governing bodies concerned to remind them of the requirements of the Protocol.) This compares with	

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	prior year information as follows –15 schools were in deficit at the end of the 19-20 financial year (9 primary, 6 secondary), 5 schools were in deficit in 20-21 (4 secondary, 1 primary) and 2 schools in 21-22 (both secondary).	
VB	***Continue to robustly scrutinise any recruitment requests for schools in deficit*** The Portfolio's policy with schools for managing budget deficits is robustly managed Any requests are discussed with Finance, HR and Inclusion colleagues as relevant and taken to DMT/ Portfolio Finance meetings for review and for final decision. The significant number of time-limited grant streams for schools this year has made this more complex for schools and when considering requests, particularly given that grant funding comes with terms and conditions. In the main, requests come from 2 secondary schools who are in a licensed deficit position.	

Self-Evaluation of Education Services 22-23

INSPECTION AREA 1: OUTCOMES

1:1 Standards and progress overall

Estyn suspended inspections of all education providers maintained by local authorities in March 2020 due to COVID-19 and no further inspections were carried out in 2019- 2020 or 2020-2021. Inspections in the non- maintained settings began again in spring term 2022 as well as pilot inspections for schools. Inspections in the school sector resumed in summer term 2022, with 15 Flintshire primary schools, 2 Flintshire secondary schools and the Portfolio Pupil Referral Unit (PPRU), inspected to date.

Inspection performance across the school sectors overall is generally strong. One primary school and one secondary school are in the statutory category of 'In Need of Significant Improvement' and the PPRU and one secondary school are in Estyn Review. In nearly all cases, there is a strong record of close correlation between the Council's pre-inspection reports and Estyn findings. The Council has a very good track record in effectively supporting schools being removed from Estyn categories. Powers of intervention, including the use of Warning Notices are used effectively where schools cause concern, to ensure challenge and support is timely and effective. Interim Executive Boards have provided successful challenge and intervention to schools in serious categories of concern. This has helped to increase the pace of change and ensure robust accountability for standards and progress.

The primary school inspection profile for Flintshire has been continuously strong. Between April 2022 and July 2023, 15 primary schools in Flintshire were inspected. Judgements are no longer given by Estyn for the five inspection areas but 14 of those schools inspected required no follow up by Estyn and five schools were invited to prepare a case study for Estyn which is an indicator of highly effective practice. One primary school was placed in the statutory category of 'In Need of Significant Improvement' in September 2022. A comprehensive package of support provided by the LA and GwE is in place for the school. There are no primary schools in the statutory category of Special Measures or in Estyn Review.

Overall, the inspection profile for Flintshire secondary schools is satisfactory. Of the 11 secondary schools in the local authority, one is in the statutory category of 'In Need of Significant Improvement. One other secondary school is in the non-statutory category of Estyn Review. Both schools were inspected during the 2022 -2023 academic year. No secondary school is in the statutory category of Special Measures. The two schools that were previously in Estyn Review were successfully removed from follow up in 2022. All secondary schools have bespoke support plans in place to ensure continued improvement. Schools causing concern are subject to robust monitoring. There are 360° action plans in place when needed and highly focused support provided by both the Regional School Improvement Service, GwE and the Local Authority.

1.2 Standards and Progress of Specific Groups

Early Education Funded Provision for 3-year-olds (Early Entitlement)

Over the last three years Flintshire has averaged 488 three-year-olds per month accessing early education, known locally as Early Entitlement (EE) through a mixed provision of mostly playgroups, private day nurseries and schools. It is worth noting, however, that the financial year 2020/21 is reducing the average significantly as there were low numbers of pupils accessing early education due to the Covid-19

pandemic. Using the last two years only, the average calculates as 540 pupils.

Pupil level data on standards achieved by three-year-olds is not collected by the Local Authority. The quality of provision in the non-maintained sector is monitored regularly by the Early Entitlement Advisory Team (EET) and is quality assured by Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).

The inspection profile for Flintshire non-maintained settings is strong. Seven settings were inspected during the 2022-23 academic year. There are currently no non-maintained EE providers in a follow up inspection category. A very small number of settings have been placed in Estyn Review or Focused Improvement over the last five years and the Local Authority has demonstrated a positive track record in supporting these settings to be removed quickly.

Post-16 Learners

No performance measures, including the consistent measures for achievement and value added, are available nationally for post-16 learners. In 2022, based on destination data available to the network, 67% of students participating in the national SEREN programme for academically able students gained a place at a Russell Group University. This was an increase on 60% in the previous year. Nearly all other students took up a place at other universities or on specialist courses. It may be that some students also achieved places at Russell Group Universities but didn't register for SEREN. Some students will also have accessed SEREN provision through the Deeside Sixth provision provided by Coleg Cambria.

1.3 Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

Judgements are no longer given by Estyn for inspection areas. Between April 2022 and July 2023, fifteen primary schools, in Flintshire were inspected. None had an area relating to 'wellbeing and attitude to learning' identified as a recommendation for improvement. In addition, two schools were invited to prepare case studies for dissemination on Estyn's website which indicates highly effective practice worthy of being shared across Wales. One case study focused on how the school addresses the needs of the school community by engaging families through provision of enriching activities that support parents to develop their children's learning and wellbeing and the other was on the school's health and wellbeing provision that has a highly positive effect, especially on the most vulnerable pupils.

In the Portfolio Pupil Referral Unit and the two secondary schools inspected during this academic year, Estyn identified many strengths in the area of 'wellbeing and attitudes to learning'. However, all three schools had improving attendance as one of their recommendations. This is a reflection on the challenges still being experienced by learners in the secondary sector engaging with education following the Covid-19 pandemic and this is not an issue exclusive to Flintshire – it is a national issue.

Attendance

The ongoing impact of the pandemic makes it difficult to draw conclusions on pupil attendance and the impact of the training which has been offered to schools to support emotional health and wellbeing. (See Inspection Area 2). Whilst there is a slight increase in the attendance across the primary sector, this remains below pre-pandemic levels. Attendance at secondary level reduced to below 90% during the pandemic and this situation remained unchanged for 2012/22 (the last set of verified data) with overall attendance sitting at 87.8%. Illness remains the primary cause of absence across both sectors. Holiday absences increased significantly in the primary sector for 2021/22 as travel restrictions eased. This reflects the significant impact of the COVID-19 lockdown with many families keen to resume holiday bookings after the lockdown ceased.

Table 1: Flintshire Schools' Attendance

	Attendance (%)				Unauthorised Absence (%)			
	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
FCC Primary Schools	92.4	91.2	93.2	94.6	0.95	0.89	0.85	0.5
FCC Secondary Schools	87.8	88.5	91.6	93.3	3.19	2.56	1.87	1.7

The levels of unauthorised absence are rising, and this is reflective of the increasing level of challenge offered by headteachers to parents around pupil absence; unauthorised absence is coded where a reason has either not been provided or one that is not accepted by the headteacher. The Council has re-instated the use of other tools such as Fixed Penalty Notices to improve attendance and this is referenced in section 2 of the report.

Table 2: Spread of attendance figures

Attendance %	Primary				Secondary			
	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19
<90	10	6	4	1	9	7	0	0
90.0-90.9	6	6	0	0	0	1	0	0
91.0-91.9	7	5	4	1	2	1	1	2
92.0-92.9	10	9	5	4	0	1	3	3
93.0-93.9	12	10	12	9	0	1	3	2
94.0-94.9	16	15	19	21	0	0	3	4
95.0-95.9	3	6	15	20	0	0	1	0
96.0-96.9	0	7	4	7	0	0	0	0
97.0-97.9	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
98.0-98.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
99.0-100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Exclusions – Permanent and Fixed Term

A reduction in the level of permanent exclusion remains a priority for the Council as it is a recommendation from the LGES Inspection of 2019. However, this remains an ongoing challenge and has been exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic on learners. Officers have continued to work with schools to try and support a reduction of exclusions using initiatives such as 'Earn Your Way Back into School' and other alternative curriculum offers, but the data shows an increasing level in both fixed-term and permanent exclusion.

Table 3: Number of Permanent Exclusions from Flintshire Schools

No of permanent Exclusions				
	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
Primary	0	0	1	3
Secondary	27	10	19	24

The primary reasons for exclusion recorded during the period 21/22 (the last set of verified data) were physical assault against a pupil, verbal/threatening behaviour against an adult, persistent and disruptive behaviour and 'other'. One noticeable increase recorded was in relation to substance related issues, associated mainly with cannabis usage. A partnership approach with Sorted, the Council's Drug and

Alcohol service has been developed to provide support to learners and schools in these circumstances and North Wales Police are consulted or engaged as appropriate. There is an increasing trend of substance misuse across the county, and this is a strategic priority of North Wales Police.

The promotion of Trauma Informed Practice remains a priority for the Education & Youth Portfolio as a strategy to reduce the levels of exclusions. It is designed to improve the understanding of education practitioners of the impact of trauma on learner behaviour and to assist them in using alternative strategies to de-escalate situations and effectively engage pupils to help them to maintain their place in school. This strategy is in the initial stages of implementation and so it is too soon to formally evaluate its impact at this point.

Table 4: Fixed-Term Exclusions

Fixed Term Exclusions				
	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
	Number of incidents (Number of Pupils)	Number of incidents (Number of Pupils)	Number of incidents (Number of Pupils)	Number of incidents (Number of Pupils)
Primary 5 Days or Less	158 (18)	99 (55)	144 (70)	251 (102)
Primary Over 5 days	7 (7)	13 (12)	1 (1)	12 (10)
Secondary 5 Days or Less	1446 (716)	902 (490)	879 (405)	1188 (533)
Secondary Over 5 days	66 (53)	22 (20)	19 (18)	22 (19)
Rate of exclusion per 1000 pupils (Primary & Secondary Combined)	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
5 days or Less	73.4	54.5	43.4	61.2
Over 5 days	6	3.2	0.8	1.4

The number of managed moves across Flintshire, a strategy to give learners a fresh start in a different school, has traditionally been low with fifteen identified in the last reporting period. However, the number has increased to thirty-six this year, with the majority being in the secondary sector. The success rate of a managed move remains low at 38% and this has been an area identified for review with secondary Headteachers.

Outcome 1: Standards and Progress Summary

Areas for ongoing improvement & sustainability

- Maintain support for all schools and early years settings with the implementation of the revised curriculum
- Improve attendance rates and reduce the number of fixed and permanent exclusions through targeted interventions, bespoke educational packages and training on areas such as Trauma Informed Practice
- Maintain positive inspection outcomes across all sectors - early years, primary, secondary and specialist provision
- Support the small number of schools in follow up or statutory category to make rapid and sustained progress against their recommendations

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INSPECTION AREA 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION SERVICES

2.1 Support for School Improvement

School Improvement Processes

The Council knows its schools very well. There are clear strategies, policies and processes that are understood by those involved and give a clear shape and direction to the Education Service.

The relationship and collaboration between Flintshire and the Regional School Improvement Service (GwE) is very good and similarly, relationships between GwE and schools in Flintshire are positive. Through this relationship, the Council has quality information about its schools and provides them with robust and appropriate challenge but also support and intervention. As a result, schools benefit from a diverse regional professional learning offer and bespoke support at individual school and cluster level. This can be evidenced by the improvement dialogue with schools and the strong inspection profile.

Improving performance in Key Stage 4 continues to be a priority following the last inspection. As a result, each secondary school has an agreed programme of support that helps deliver the identified priorities within a school's improvement plan. The school support plan clearly defines how school improvement resources ensure targeted improvements in key priority areas. Where required, schools are also supported by a 360° support plan which identifies enhanced support needs through LA services and GwE. These plans are monitored through the Council's Quality Board.

The Council, in partnership with GwE, has effective procedures to support schools in their self-evaluation and improvement planning. Schools are robustly challenged on the quality of their self-evaluation processes. The impact of this can be seen in the positive profile of Estyn inspections.

Schools have made effective use of the milestones provided by GwE for the reform of the Curriculum for Wales and Additional Learning Needs. This allows schools to reflect on their current position with regards to the reform journey and provides clear next steps for their consideration. Cluster work is enhanced through collaborative work and the sharing of priorities and dialogue helps capture the level of support required by schools and collaborations of schools.

Senior leaders within the service use a range of data and intelligence effectively to ensure areas of improvement are identified quickly and addressed robustly through detailed business planning. Data and information are scrutinised robustly to monitor progress against agreed actions. As a result, the Council is effective in challenging schools where needed and allocating specific support for those schools.

There is a comprehensive and well embedded professional learning offer for all schools in Flintshire and this is enhanced by what is being offered at local level by schools and between schools. There are high levels of engagement by Flintshire schools in professional learning. The offer supports school leadership at all levels across the county and has been strengthened by a range of strategies including access to regional and national development programmes. The local authority has supported the development of leadership in Flintshire schools at various levels. Subscription to the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and Aspiring Heads course is strong while existing and recently appointed headteachers are very well supported through the New and Acting headteacher programme. The impact of this has been demonstrated in the good recruitment levels at senior leadership level across Flintshire schools, even within the overall context of national challenges to recruitment and retention.

There has been a clear focus on improving teaching in Flintshire schools. The impact of this focus can be evidenced in the evaluation of practice at school and regional level and through the continued improvement in Inspection Area 3 of the Flintshire Estyn profile (Teaching). All schools have been involved in the ongoing professional development and support programme for the implementation of the new curriculum.

Primary and Secondary networks and peer-to-peer work has strengthened collaboration and led to a stronger shared understanding of effective practice. The Secondary Alliance model is embedded and has led to improved levels of collaboration between schools in sharing practice at senior and middle leadership level and in standards of teaching and learning. The Middle Leadership professional development programmes have been successful in improving the quality of leaders in core subjects, literacy and numeracy and in the foundation learning phase through development of skills and knowledge. Bespoke approaches have been tailored to meet the requirements of individual schools; coaching programmes for groups and individuals have been delivered in several schools and had a clear impact on the work of leaders. Shortages in key personnel have also been supported through the deployment of expertise from neighbouring schools.

Collaborative practice amongst leaders is reinforced through strategic forums, at both headteacher and deputy level. The Council supports strong and effective communication and a mutual sense of common responsibility for the development of responses and actions to local and national challenges. Good practice is shared and local expertise nurtured.

Schools in Flintshire are engaging well with the National Reform Journey and in developing themselves as Learning Organisations. The regional reform strategy gives clear direction on how GwE works with schools to ensure a clear and systematic approach to providing support and also provides opportunities to assist schools to reflect on their engagement with all aspects of the reform journey. As a result, primary schools in Flintshire were all able to implement the new curriculum in September 2022 and all secondary schools in September 2023.

Post-16 Education

There are six high schools in Flintshire with sixth forms and a Council partnership with one Further Education (FE) college with a dedicated A level centre. Two high schools merged their sixth forms to create Flint 6th. In 2022, there were 523 learners in Year 13 and 544 in year 12 across all school sixth form provision. 62 post-16 learners were learning through the medium of Welsh at Ysgol Maes Garmon. All school sixth forms offer the Welsh Baccalaureate, however, the number completing the full qualification differs between schools and years.

The Council continues to work closely with its six post-16 providers and in partnership with Coleg Cambria to shape post-16 provision for students and to ensure clear pathways to professional and technical routes to employment, alongside robust academic routes. The appointment of a Post-16 Learning Adviser has added additional capacity to the portfolio's work. Regular meetings of the post-16 network of schools are held to agree and review curriculum planning and local delivery. Annual plans are submitted to Welsh Government for scrutiny. The portfolio engages with the Economic Recovery Board who are keen to work with schools, particularly around developing apprenticeships.

Welsh Language Advisory Service

The portfolio's Welsh Advisory Service works in English and Welsh medium primary schools. Under

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the Welsh Government's new language categorisation policy, all 59 English medium schools are defined as Category 1 schools and all 5 Welsh schools are defined as Category 3 Welsh-medium primary schools.

The Team's main objective is to contribute to Flintshire's Welsh in Education Strategy by ensuring progress in Welsh in Category 1 and Category 3 primary schools. They work in partnership with schools to improve the quality of teaching and develop the language and methodology skills of the education workforce. School Workforce Annual (SWAC) data for 2022 shows that 15% of the primary workforce (teachers and teaching assistants) have no Welsh language skills. This is a 0.5% increase from 2021.

Through a range of strategies, a targeted approach is used that includes the direct training of teachers and teaching assistants through intensive language and methodology courses and by working collaboratively with other key partners e.g. GwE, Canolfan Bedwyr (providers of the Sabbatical courses), Urdd and Menter Iaith.

The informal use of Welsh in all schools is a strategic priority. It is delivered by an appointed coordinator for Siarter Iaith (Welsh Language Charter) in Welsh medium primary and a designated person leading and co-ordinating Cymraeg Campus in English medium primary schools. All five Welsh medium primary schools in Flintshire have achieved their Gold Siarter Iaith award. The challenge is to sustain this level as part of the Covid-19 recovery. All English medium primary schools in Flintshire have embarked on their journey with Cymraeg Campus. During the last academic year, eight schools were successfully verified for the Bronze award and two for the Silver award. Thirty-one schools have now achieved the Bronze award, six schools achieved the Silver Award, one of which has now gone on to achieve the Gold Award.

In the summer term of 2023, the Welsh service organised a jamboree for foundation learners - the first for three years due to the pandemic. 74% of primary schools, including the primary special school, attended the singing festival over three days with 1,450 pupils attending.

Flintshire schools are encouraged to provide opportunities for staff to further their language training through the Welsh Government funded sabbatical courses. Numbers attending from Flintshire have been consistently high on courses across the North Wales region. Between 2020 and 2023, 20 teachers have accessed the sabbatical programme: Cymraeg Mewn Blwyddyn (Welsh in a year) – 9 teachers; Sylfaen (Foundation) – 5 teachers; Canolradd / Uwch (Intermediate/ Advanced) – 6 teachers. They continue to receive post-course support from the Welsh Advisory Service to embed their practice within their school. For September 2023, a further 7 Flintshire teachers have been allocated places on the Cymraeg Mewn Blwyddyn course; this equates to 50% of the spaces available across the North Wales region. Over the last two years the trend of teachers accessing this training has nearly doubled. The Welsh Advisory Service works closely with the course providers, delivering methodology sessions during the courses and provides focused support to staff on their return to school, with a particular aim of supporting embedding of practice across the whole school e.g. delivering training sessions to teaching assistants within their schools, becoming Flintshire verifiers for Cymraeg Campus and in some instances, becoming the cluster lead for Welsh.

One member of the Welsh Advisory Team works with Welsh medium primary schools for any newcomers who arrive in the 8-11 age group. An accelerated programme of language intervention has been developed in conjunction with the Welsh medium schools. A representative from each school has been trained to deliver the programme effectively. In 2022-2023, 15 newcomers

completed this programme. A member of the team also works closely with the Welsh secondary school supporting the 'Trochi' (Immersion) programme for Year 6 learners who transfer from English medium primary school into Welsh medium secondary, including delivering language and methodology sessions during the 4-week period in the summer term before transfer to secondary school. 18 pupils from 12 different primary schools joined the 'Trochi' programme in September 2022. The service has made effective use of the second year of the additional funding stream for Latecomers to Welsh medium education. This included a range of projects for Foundation Learning, 8–11-year-olds and Key Stage 3. Plans are well underway to provide learning facilities for the Trochi programme to operate out of the new build for Ysgol Croes Atti in Flint from 2024.

Members of the team continually evaluate their work to ensure schools receive a high-quality service, refining methods accordingly and using evidence-based practices to inform improvements, e.g., by identifying language support required as a result of the Welsh language skills section of the School Workforce Annual Census (SWAC), creating working parties of teachers refining curriculum planning for schools, identifying schools to share good practice. The team produces a monthly bulletin that provides information on professional development opportunities, celebrates success and expectations for Welsh as well as including relevant external stakeholder input. Through the highly effective cluster work for Welsh, the service can facilitate and support schools in striving to build capacity within their own settings. 1 Welsh medium and 2 English medium schools were invited by the regional school improvement service, GwE, to showcase their effective practice to teachers from across North Wales. The focus was on how Welsh language is developed within the Curriculum for Wales. These schools offered an insight into their vision for developing the Welsh language and exemplified their provision. Flintshire schools engage positively with the support offered and provide regular feedback, which informs the ongoing work of the Service.

Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and Forum

The 10-year Flintshire Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2022-2032 was approved by Welsh Government following a period of public consultation and endorsement by the Council's Cabinet and Scrutiny process. Subsequently, a 5-year action plan was also approved by Welsh Government. The implementation of the WESP is driven and monitored by the Flintshire Welsh Strategic Forum made up of officers, elected members, school representatives and other organisations linked to the development of the Welsh language and Welsh medium education. A representative from Welsh Government regularly attends meetings of the Forum. The Forum is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Welsh Language.

The Forum works very effectively as a multi-agency platform for delivering and monitoring the WESP. All members bring high levels of knowledge and expertise to the Forum which are freely shared to achieve the common vision of promoting Welsh-medium education and the Welsh language through all formal and non-formal education settings such as schools and youth settings. Most members of the Forum sit on one or more of the three sub-committees – Provision, Standards and Workforce. These meet regularly during the year to work on their specific actions within the 5-year plan and provide feedback on their progress in the following termly Forum meeting.

The Forum is robust in holding the Council to account in its delivery of the Plan and achieving the targets contained within it. The Forum's terms of reference and membership are regularly reviewed. Reports on the progress of the WESP are routinely presented to the Education, Youth and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Flintshire remains committed to build additional capacity in the Welsh Medium school network to support the WESP. Significant capital investment has been made

through the Council's capital programme and through the Sustainable Learning Communities funding to improve facilities and increase the number of Welsh medium places available.

Advanced planning is underway to review further opportunities for growth in Welsh medium schools including a new build for an existing Welsh medium school in Flint and a new start up Welsh medium school in the Buckley/Mynydd Isa area. This would deliver on the Council's key objective of having Welsh medium early years and primary school provision in every major town across the county.

School Governance Support

The governor support role within the Education Portfolio (0.2fte) sits with the role of Senior Manager for Business Support. The part time provision and support provided to governing bodies is enhanced by access to the dedicated web subscription resource and helpline provided by Governors Cymru. Exemplars of good practice/case studies from governing bodies in Flintshire can be referenced on the website.

The key functions of the service relate to supporting governing bodies, as necessary, in the following areas - Schools Causing Concern procedures; School Federations; Accelerated Improvement Boards; Interim Executive Boards; training and development, either through commissioning or direct delivery; administration of the Flintshire Governors Association; appointment of Local Authority governors to governing bodies, and securing governor nominations to the Schools Budget Forum and Education, Youth & Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Council continues to remain compliant with the statutory duty to offer the regulatory school governor training programme. The Welsh Government statutory governor training modules are available online with a commissioned external provider. This online training portal registered 192 new log-ons during the year suggesting a good level of engagement with statutory training is being maintained. Governing Bodies can monitor virtual attendance of their governors through the portal and are responsible for monitoring the impact of training on the discharge of their duties.

There continues to be commissioning of virtual training from external partners on the role of governors in safeguarding and in data protection.

The network of North Wales Governor Support Officers continues to meet virtually each term with the GWE lead for Governor Support. The network continues to share approaches and resources to support governor development. GwE offers support to individual governing bodies, when requested, through their professional learning offer. Similarly, there continues to be representation at the ADEW National network of Governor Support Officers who meet termly with representatives of Welsh Government. The Governor Development Manager (Senior Manager for Business Support) is currently the Chair of the ADEW GSO (Association Directors Education Wales, Governor Support Officers) national network, and contributor to a Welsh Government working group on the refresh of a self-evaluation resource for governing bodies.

Meetings of the Schools Budget Forum, Education and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Welsh in Education Strategic Form are held virtually and there remains consistent representation by governors.

Although there are approximately 1250 governor positions within the Authority, the Council only has responsibility for administering the nomination of Local Authority governors (circa 200) to school governing bodies. There have been no concerns raised by schools arising from governor vacancies.

2.2 Support for Vulnerable Learners

The challenges of recent years have resulted in schools developing a range of alternative offers to re-engage learners who are struggling to attend. These include:
- On-site targeted KS3 small group provision offering a range of intervention to catch up and facilitate a supported phased return to mainstream provision.
- On-site small group provision for KS4 providing an alternative curriculum offer to maintain interest and engagement.
- On-site Community Hub created to facilitate multi-agency working.
- Offsite community-based centres providing access to core subjects and more vocationally targeted opportunities and accreditation for those who are unable to access their education on the main school site.

In some cases, there have been collaborative approaches between a school and other council services, such as Youth Services, to enhance the provision on offer. These options have also been utilised to support individuals either at risk of, or those who have been excluded. This provision is being further enhanced this year by the Community Focused Schools Service which has recently been established following access to WG targeted grant funding.

Flintshire provides a suitable range of services to promote social inclusion and support for learners with ALN through a combination of internal and externally commissioned services and provision. The Council meets its statutory duties well as demonstrated by the low levels of appeal to the Education Tribunal and the low levels of young people becoming NEET.

Flintshire has operated a model of delegated funding for pupils with special educational needs/additional learning needs for several years now. The model for delegation to Primary Schools was revised ahead of the last financial year in response to the changes brought into place by the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET). This resulted in greater autonomy for schools to develop a range of universal and targeted interventions to suit the needs of their school communities. In the main, schools have welcomed the revised funding model and the ability to be more flexible in response to need. However, the increasing levels of presenting need against a backdrop of reduced budgets is resulting in additional financial pressures in some schools; responding to children with complex needs who move school in year remains a challenge, particularly within the primary sector. The models for both Primary and Secondary schools remain under review during the implementation of ALNET to ensure that funding is allocated appropriately.

Plas Derwen Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) transitioned into its new purpose-built facility in September 2021. A new headteacher took up post in September 2022 following the retirement of the previous post holder. The provision was inspected in October 2022 and placed into Estyn Review and the Council has worked closely with GwE and the headteacher to secure improvement against the recommendations ahead of the revisit in the Autumn Term 2023. Council expenditure remains higher for those pupils presenting with a range of behavioural, social and emotional needs as this continues to be the most significant area of presenting need.

Trauma-informed practice remains a priority for the Education & Youth Portfolio. Senior and middle managers within the portfolio have been supported to access the 2-day training with a further event being held alongside secondary Headteachers/senior leaders. A working group has been established with secondary schools who have identified this as a priority area and is supported by the Senior Manager Inclusion & Progression, Principal Education Psychologist and the Learning Adviser for Children who are Looked After (CLA). Further training targeted at CLA leads in schools has been organised for 2023/24.

Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

Additional capacity was allocated to the ALN team in response to the implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET). The team now comprises of a six Learning Advisers, including the Early Years ALN Lead Officer (EYALNLO) and dedicated ALN officers for Post 16 and for children who are looked after (CLA). The team is further supported by 2 seconded school Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators (ALNCos), one on a full-time basis and the other on a part-time basis. The Senior Learning Adviser for ALN manages the team and leads on the implementation of ALNET.

The Learning Advisors meet the statutory obligations in respect of children and young people with special educational and additional learning needs (SEN/ALN). Each of the core officers has a cluster group of schools and follows the pupils from entry into primary school and transition to secondary school. The change in the Council's duties in relation to Post-16 learners under ALNET led to the development of a designated officer to lead on the development of policy and process. The post holder is also the designated officer for all Post-16 individuals with ALN. The department works within clear protocols and decision-making processes to assess and make decisions regarding placement and provision for learners with ALN to ensure an equitable approach.

The Team continues to build on its achievements in relation to the first year of ALNET Implementation. The EYALNLO has provided training on ALNET, Autism and person-centred tools to a range of stakeholders including non-maintained settings, Family Support Team and Pre-school Development Team within the Health Service. 'ALNET repeat/refresher' training has also been offered to all non-maintained pre-school settings. The Early Years' Provision Map has been published, as has the Conwy & Flintshire ALN Toolkit which includes a comprehensive early years' section. This has served to develop reinforce the understanding and interpretation of the Act and particular prevalent areas of ALN.

The EYALNLO is embedded across several forums including the Flintshire Successful Pre-school Pathways project, Northeast Wales Speech & Language group, Flintshire Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership, EYALNLO regional and national meetings. This level of engagement continues to strengthen a shared understanding of process and ensure a collaborative approach. Enhanced transition from pre-school settings into school for each child known to the Council through the Pre-school Moderation Panel and Pre-school Funding Delegation Panel has been arranged and focused upon this academic year in response to the challenges experienced due to limited transition in previous years due to Covid.

Under ALNET, health professionals have a duty to notify the LA of children who are likely to have ALN. The average number of requests/Health notifications over previous 3 years (2018 – 2021) was 57 children. Last academic year (2021 – 2022) there were 102 which indicates a significant increase in identified need. The most significant area of presenting need is identified as speech, language and communication difficulties (SLCD) and is attributed the impact of the pandemic. In response to the increases in neurodevelopmental presentation, a Learning Adviser with responsibility for Autism was appointed, with the post holder taking up the position in February 2023 to provide advice, support and guidance to schools and families.

As identified above, a designated Learning Adviser for Post-16 has been appointed within the team. A Post-16 Steering Group, comprising of membership from Education and Social Services has met on a monthly basis and has formulated and agreed the processes by which the Council will discharge its duties under ALNET. Regular meetings have also been held with secondary ALNCos and representatives from Coleg Cambria to ensure that process are shared and understood and that transition arrangements are in place. This has resulted in better links between schools and the local college and improved communication as an outcome, leading to increased sharing of information prior

to transition and invitations to review meetings. The college have developed and shared a clear provision map which will inform decision making going forward and the Conwy & Flintshire Post-16 ALN toolkit is in development which will provide further support to practitioners. It is anticipated that this activity will support learners with ALN to transition more successfully into further education provision and reduce the instances of individuals becoming NEET.

The Council commenced the conversion process for Statements of Special Educational Needs to Individual Development Plans (IDPs) as per the Welsh Government timetable in September 2022. In April 2022, there were 904 children with a Statement, of which, a total of 223 statements were identified for conversion as pupils within the mandated year groups (Nursery, Reception, Years 6, 10 & 11) for the academic year 2022/23. A further 4 children in non-mandated year groups were identified for conversion following parental request. The Council committed to the approach of having a Learning Adviser in all conversion meetings to model, coach and reinforce person-centred practice. It also served to support consistency across the school network and provide support to both schools and families. This was a significant challenge in terms of capacity for the team, including pupils in both Flintshire and out of county schools. A total of 141 statement conversions were completed by April 2023 and of these, a total of only 14% were deemed to be late with permissible exceptions. It is hoped that this significant investment will support schools to be more informed and confident in implementing the process across the remaining 2 years of implementation when a further 677 Statements will require conversion.

Within the reporting period, the Council received a total of 76 referrals for Local Authority Consideration for ALN and a total of 39 requests for Reconsideration. For a Consideration, the Council has 12 weeks to determine whether a child has ALN and make decision about the additional learning provision (ALP) that the child may need. Of the 47 that have been completed so far, 94% have been completed within the timescale. The Council has a period of 7 weeks to complete the process for a Reconsideration. These are cases where the learner has an IDP and either the school or parent requests the Council to take over the responsibility for the plan and /or reconsider the ALN and ALP to be made for the individual. Of the 25 completed to date, a total of 44% have been completed within the designated timescale. Having reviewed this, it is proving extremely challenging to complete the process within the 7 weeks. Given that the Council delegates funding directly to schools to meet the needs of children with ALN including providing teaching assistant support, these children are typically very complex in nature, often requiring specialist provision. The lack of capacity within the Council's own specialist provision, which is mirrored in the independent sector, is impacting significantly on this as officers are increasingly struggling to source appropriate provision. These challenges with meeting the dictated timescales are being reported to Welsh Government and appear to be a nationwide issue.

Person-centred practice remains a high priority across the Inclusion & Progression Service with several officers delivering training to schools. ALN Learning Advisers are observing an increase in person-centred approaches by schools with communication and interaction being of a high quality; feedback from both parents and schools is that they feel more involved in the process. Flintshire has an excellent record of working professionally with parents and avoiding and resolving disagreements. Parental questionnaires that have been returned show a high level of satisfaction and the team operates a disagreement tracker to monitor cases where additional resolution is required. One appeal was lodged during the reporting period which was subsequently withdrawn by the parent during the appeal process.

The quality of one-page profiles and school IDPs remains variable with a need for more focus on developing person-centred outcomes.

Education Psychology Service (EPS)

Staffing levels within the EPS remain a concern, with the Education Psychologist (EP):pupil ratio in Flintshire remaining the most challenging in Wales according to the NAPEP-C survey in 2022. Attempts to recruit have been unsuccessful in the main, with the only option being to appoint trainee staff ahead of their completion of the EP training course. Assuming they all qualify, 3 staff have been appointed to start in September 2024. To support with the current staffing gaps, Assistant Education Psychologists (AEPs) have been recruited in the absence of fully qualified staff. This is reflective of the national picture and the lack of available qualified staff is a matter that is being raised with Welsh Government on a regular basis. The service continues to support the training course by hosting trainees in either years 1, 2 or 3. This is additional workload for the service, but it is felt to be important to the continuation of the profession and also to promote the reputation of the Flintshire team amongst new entrants to the profession and support future recruitment.

The Group Consultation model is implemented in the Primary sector and facilitates a half-termly link with every primary school in Flintshire. This forum serves to allocate the time for individual and direct work, and also serves as an adult solution circle that allows for the merging of 'expert' EP and teacher advice to generate workable and creative person-centered plans for identified children. A total of 62 meetings were held over the year, with 272 pupil consultations taking place during the group sessions.   The sessions also provided the opportunity for discussion and development around a number of areas including sensory needs and processing, literacy & numeracy difficulties, social stories, Autism/social communication, accessible classrooms, emotionally based school avoidance, bereavement, divorce, self-harm and eating disorders. These are reflective of that challenges that children and schools are facing at the current time. A total of 156 consultation sessions were undertaken across the secondary and specialist sectors.

The statutory duties for EPs under ALNET have altered as compared to the previous SEN legislation. There is no longer an explicit timescale for the completion of EP work however, the timescale for the Council to complete the process of which the EP is a part, are tighter than ever and this remains a challenge to comply with as noted in the report section on ALN. The change in process can also mean that the child is potentially unknown to the service and involvement unanticipated, particularly in relation to those pupils attending a school in England. The team has worked hard to re-prioritise work at short notice to work to the ALN deadlines.

Feedback from schools suggests that EP involvement is generally valued, but that an increase in the time for individual direct work is required. This work is time consuming and is difficult to provide with the current staffing levels but has been seen to be impactful and positively rewarding for all including the EP.

Building capacity is an integral part of the service's remit. Training is generally well-received with over 90% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that the training was beneficial and informative. It is recognised that training is best received when it comes from a need identified by a school or cluster of schools, is delivered in a workshop style that allows for discussion and problem solving and followed up with check in and workshops. This model is being implemented where possible to maximise the impact of service time allocated. Examples of training offered this year are Emotion Coaching, Circle Solutions, Moving Up (support for transition) and Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) and Literacy Awareness for school.

Young Person's Counselling Service

The Young Person's Counselling Service is an integral part of the Council's support mechanism to prevent young people from becoming vulnerable. All secondary schools, including the specialist school Ysgol Maes Hyfryd and Plas Derwen (PRU) are allocated designated counsellor time. Referrals are

also taken for pupils in years 5 and 6 in primary schools and there has been increase in focus and delivery in the primary sector with group work being offered on targeted areas of need. The service has looked to broaden its offer including the use of a range of therapeutic interventions including dog therapy, creative therapies and play therapy in response to individual need. Support for exam stress has been provided and support for refugee children has also been a priority this year.

The table below outlines the level of engagement of the service over the year. This clearly demonstrates a significant increase in need with the team supporting almost double the number of clients and utilising the group work model where appropriate to support an increased level engagement. Similar to previous years, anxiety and family issues remain the main reasons for engagement with the service, with anger matters being seen as more prevalent for the first time. The support from the Council's services in response to this will be considered via the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Forum to identify what further training/intervention could be offered.

Table 5: Number of clients and presenting issues

	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Number of Clients	547	308	226
Number of sessions attended	3651	1351	933
Presenting issues on referral (3 most common in rank order high to low)	Anxiety Family Anger	Anxiety Family Bereavement	Family Anxiety Behaviour related

All young people engaging with the Counselling service undertake an initial assessment (YP-Core) and this is repeated at the end of the intervention to measure impact. The information below shows that on average, the young people acknowledge a positive outcome following engagement with the sessions. It is notable that the initial scores are increasing indicating a higher level of individual need on engagement which is likely to be reflective of the pandemic legacy.

Table 6: Impact of the Young Person's Counselling Service

	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Changes in the average result of the Young People's Core Score - Start of Episode	20.84	18.57	17.28
Changes in the average result of the Young People's Core Score - End of Episode	11.81	9.57	8.86

The service has also offered wellbeing coaching to adults this year linked to the Welsh Government InReach support programme. This has been delivered alongside coaching and support for Headteachers and staff who sadly have had to respond to a serious incident, i.e. the death of a pupil, member of staff or someone closely linked to the school community. Schools have been appreciative of the support provided in these very difficult situations.

Sensory Service

During this reporting year the service has expanded to include delivery to Conwy County Council alongside Denbighshire, Wrexham and Flintshire. The service has continued to support schools to meet the educational and emotional needs of Flintshire's sensory impaired pupils - 82 pupils with a visual impairment (VI) and 125 with hearing impairments (HI). Support for families of pre-school

children remained a key priority for the service during the year. There were 15 pre-school children with HI and 8 with VI provided for by the team. The service continued to use national eligibility criteria to determine the level of involvement. The Covid pandemic has impacted on this particular cohort with delays in medical procedures relating particularly to hearing impairment increasing the number of referrals to the service. Caseloads have been adjusted to ensure that all eligible pupils continued to access the service.

The continued aim of the service is to build capacity within schools/placements in supporting children and young people with sensory impairment. Bespoke packages were offered at both a county and school level and 18 schools/settings were offered virtual training via Microsoft TEAMS in Flintshire with good/excellent feedback received.

During the reporting period, there were no pupils with a sensory impairment excluded from Flintshire schools. A very small number of those with a visual impairment had significantly low attendance due to medical conditions which impacted on their ability to attend school. The service provided advice and support to establish the root cause of the absence and also support a phased return or access to alternative provision as required. There were 13 pupils with a sensory impairment in year 11 (11 pupils) and Year 13 (2 pupils) in 2021/22. All pupils went on to a positive outcome either at a school, local college, through an apprenticeship or university.

The Service has been an integral part of the Council's response to ALNET, working closely with the ALN Team. The Learning Adviser has been part of on-going national discussions regarding the application of the ALN Code for children and young people with a sensory impairment where there remains a level of confusion around the definition of additional learning provision.

Feedback from Additional Learning Needs Coordinators indicated a positive response to the service interventions, with 92% indicating that the written advice/reports provided were clear and helped staff to meet the pupil's needs. Similarly, 92% indicated that input from the team facilitated the pupil to access the curriculum. All schools felt that the team had communicated well with them and that team members had behaved in a professional manner. A total of 75% of the respondents felt that staff in their school had received appropriate training and/or advice to help them meet the overall sensory needs of the pupils.

Communication & Language Advisory Support Service

The impact of the Covid pandemic remains evident in a number of areas, but noticeably so with regards to speech, language and communication skills, with an increasing level of concern being flagged by schools particularly in relation to pre-school and Foundation Learning. Flintshire was the first council in Wales to offer training to all schools on Early Talkboost (age 3-4) and Talkboost (age 4-7) programmes and the roll out of this to all primary schools has continued in response to increased levels of presenting need. As of March 2023, 55 schools (40 schools March 2022) have been trained in one or both interventions, resulting in a total of 360 trained staff across the school network, an increase of 72 from last year.

The programme provides the facility for schools to record pre and post intervention data which can be shared with officers. The tables below indicate the percentage improvements in each of the intervention areas prior to and following the intervention.

Table 7 Early Talkboost Impact

	Attention and listening	Understanding words & sentences	Speaking	Personal social and emotional skills
% at expected level before intervention	19	31	15	9
% at expected level after intervention	34	49	29	32

The social impact of the pandemic is evident through the low initial scores in the areas of social skills, along with the other more formal skills associated with academic development, i.e. sentence structure and storytelling. It is pleasing to see that all areas demonstrate a positive impact. Initial pupil assessments indicated 33% of the early Talkboost cohort and 39% of the Talkboost group were working below their age expected level and would require further intervention and/or a referral for speech therapy intervention demonstrating a significant level of need. Following access to the programme, these levels reduced to 19.8% and 10.7% respectively.

Table 8 Talkboost Impact

	Understanding spoken language	Understanding & using vocabulary	Sentences	Storytelling & narrative	Social interaction
% at expected level before intervention	12	21	9	2	7
% at expected level after intervention	35	30	14	7	12

Given the success of the programmes and ongoing presenting need, officers are considering offering training on the programme for KS2 pupils.

The service has continued to provide outreach to individual pupils demonstrating a significant level of need. This is delivered in collaboration with the Health Service. The number of pupils requiring this intervention has increased from 45 last year, to 54 this year. Of these, 22 have been discharged from the service due to either the good progress made, the need for referral to alternative service or access to specialist educational provision in the primary/secondary Resource bases. Destination data for the secondary Resource shows a strong positive trend for pupils moving successfully on to a positive Post-16 outcome.

The Language Development project has also continued to operate. This is a centrally funded project which is based around a 'planted' adult model and bases trained teaching assistants in schools demonstrating a high level of need either for monolingual pupils or those with English as an additional language. This is a time limited intervention (a term and a half) and schools are asked to rate the impact. A total of 34 schools were supported in the academic year 2021/22. The following average ratings were received regarding the impact of the intervention (scoring 0-5, with 5 being the maximum):

- Effectiveness of planted adult model   4.77

- Impact on pupils' language and communication skills   4.15

- Impact on staff understanding of how to support skill development   4.54

The project uses a 10-point scale to measure pupil progress. During this period the average starting score of pupils was 3.67, whilst the average post project score was 5.19, showing an average increase of 1.52 language development points, clearly demonstrating the positive impact of the strategy.

Support for English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Gypsy Travellers

The number of pupils identified as EAL continues to rise with a further increase of 81, taking the total this year to 1572. All pupils are assessed against a 5-point scale (A – E) with regards to their language capabilities and appropriate support allocated either on an individual or group work basis. Those identified as being at stage A are new to English/Welsh whilst those at stage E are deemed to be fluent. Those at stages A and B are prioritised for direct intervention from the service and the following table shows the number of pupils over the last 3 years:

Table 9 EAL Stage A & B Overview

Pupils at Stage A & B	2023	2022	2021
Primary	631	625	620
Secondary	104	100	89
Total	735	725	709

The number of languages spoken across the county has increased from 53 to 57 this year. A total of 158 pupils (Year 1 – Year 11) arrived in Flintshire between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023. This is an increase of 50 pupils compared with the previous year and can be related directly to the impact of the Ukrainian Sponsorship Scheme, with 57 of the new arrivals coming from Ukraine.

Flintshire Council has responded positively and pro-actively to the three refugee schemes, namely the Ukrainian Sponsorship Scheme (UKSS), The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS). As of April 2023, the number of pupils in Flintshire schools as a result of these schemes sits at 84 Ukrainian, 29 Afghan and 19 Syrian children. Schools have responded extremely positively and welcomed pupils and their families into their school communities. This has been facilitated by the significant support offered via the EAL team and the coordination by the Learning Adviser who ensured a harmonised response across the Education & Youth Portfolio. This ensured that school admissions and access to transport were implemented in a timely manner and that additional support both at a pupil and parental level could be accessed from other relevant services and agencies; it was a notable achievement that all Ukrainian children entering Flintshire had been placed and attended school at the start of the 2022/23 academic year.

The Inclusion & Progression Service is increasing its use of data to support greater evaluation of need/impact. Attendance data is now generated for several potentially vulnerable groups including EAL. Attendance for this group is largely in line with the overall Flintshire pupil average. It was noted that over the winter months, some pupils, particularly those from Ukraine were being kept off from school for minor ailments such as a cold. This was because of different cultural expectations. Conversations took place with the families to explain the process and expectations within Wales to ensure that pupils were not absent unnecessarily.

The service EAL stakeholder questionnaires indicated that of the 287 pupil responses, 98% felt happy and safe in school at least some of the time. It is also pleasing that all of the 58 parents who responded feel comfortable talking to their child's class teachers. Where parents or children have indicated that they do not feel happy or safe, the main reasons seem to be around a lack of friendship

groups, thus emphasising the importance of buddy schemes and other collaborative learning and play opportunities for our EAL pupils. The surveys provide important information regarding service impact but also allow the team to follow up on information relating to matters of concern to pupils and parents.
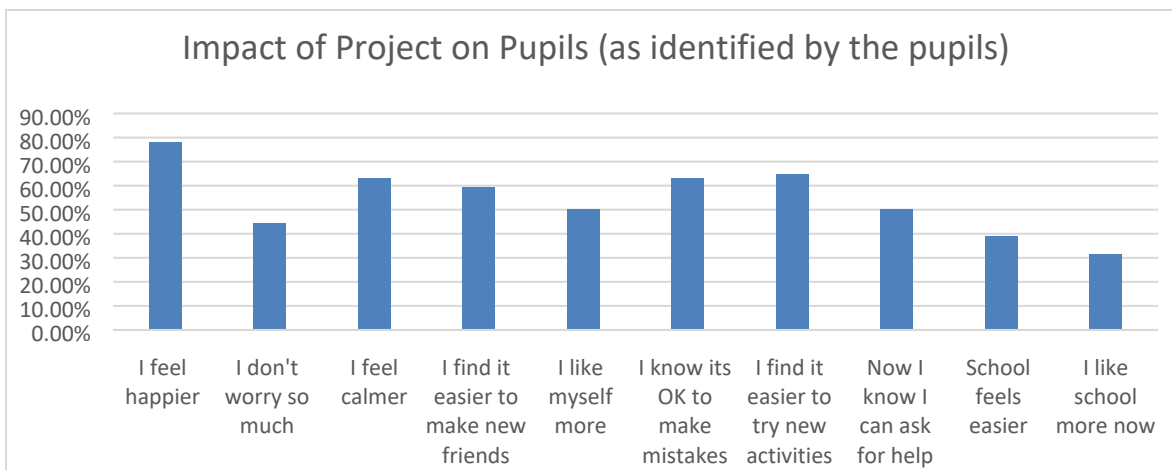
The school questionnaire, completed by 250 teachers, indicated that over 90% of EAL pupils are perceived to be making appropriate progress with their spoken language, but there is less confidence when the same scoring is applied to written work. This is to be expected as oral language skills often develop more quickly that written skills. Unfortunately, limited capacity within the EAL service has meant that direct intervention from the team for pupils with regards to writing skills is not possible, so advice and support is being provided to class teachers as an alternative.

The Traveller community remains an incredibly transient, with numbers altering on a weekly basis across Flintshire. As of March 2023, the number had dropped from 166 to 148 for the same time period in 2022. There has however, been an increase in the comparative number of pupils on the caseload with whom the service has engaged, increasing from 196 for 2021/22 to 206 for 2022/23. The figures across the Primary sector reflect a strong level of engagement, with parents choosing to send their children to school. There is a different picture across the Secondary sector despite the offer of enhanced transition, alternative education opportunities, regular home visits and support for schools. The implementation of the Curriculum for Wales is also proving to be a challenge around school engagement, with regards to the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) element of the curriculum. The Traveller Community holds strong cultural views which means that access to the RSE curriculum in the model of delivery planned is causing such levels of concern that they are considering the withdrawal of their children from school. Officers are working with Welsh Government, schools and the community to seek a form of resolution.

During the year, the service welcomed 34 new Traveller pupils to the county, all of which were allocated school places or alternative education provision along with transport. Monitoring of attendance data has shown an average attendance of 69.9% for the Autumn Term 2022 and 73.3% for the Spring Term 2023 which sits noticeably below the wider Flintshire averages of around 90%. This remains an area of priority for improvement. Nationally verified exclusion levels for Traveller children were above the average for other ethnic groups for the academic year 2021/22 with a loss of 66.5 school days in total. Local figures for the period from September 2022 to April 2023 shows a reduction to 23 days, which is positive.

A programme of alternative provision has been implemented again this year focusing on pupils who may be considered vulnerable and has included a number of Traveller pupils. The provision is targeted at KS2 and KS3 and continued to operate with a focus on developing a sense of community, belonging and self-worth alongside skill development. The pupils were asked to rate themselves against the key criteria below having engaged with the provision. A total of 82 pupils responded and the table indicates the percentage of the group who felt there had been a positive impact in the designated area having engaged with the alternative provision. The overall positive impact was corroborated by the data collected from schools who noted that 65% of pupils put forward for engagement showed an improvement in the level of engagement in lessons, 42% had an improvement in their general behaviour and 48%showed an improvement in their self-confidence levels.

Table 10: Impact of Alternative Provision

Impact of Project on Pupils (as identified by the pupils)

A bar chart showing the following approximate percentages:
- I feel happier: ~78%
- I don't worry so much: ~45%
- I feel calmer: ~63%
- I find it easier to make new friends: ~60%
- I like myself more: ~50%
- I know its OK to make mistakes: ~63%
- I find it easier to try new activities: ~65%
- Now I know I can ask for help: ~50%
- School feels easier: ~40%
- I like school more now: ~33%

The ongoing reluctance of the Traveller community to engage with education at a secondary level, in particular past Year 9, has resulted in the service offering an alternative model of engagement. The primary aim of the activity is to try and reintegrate pupils either back into mainstream education, or if this is not possible, into further education at the end of Year 11. A range of activities have been offered including boxing, Aura sports' course, hair and beauty and cooking courses. Of the 24 Traveller pupils engaged, 4 returned to school, with the remainder maintaining their engagement with the activities. Of those in Year 11, 7 out of the 8 transferred into a Post-16 outcome and reflects the positive impact of the team on both the pupils and their families.

Support for raising the educational achievement of Children who are Looked After (CLA)

The levels of children who are 'looked after' have remained fairly stable over the past 3 years, 263 in 2020, 258 in 2021 and 255 in 2022. The number of those children who are of statutory school age varies year on year - 157 in 2022 compared with 178 in 2021. The majority of CLA are educated in Flintshire maintained provision (68%), with the remainder accessing their education in out of county maintained provision or specialist independent settings. This compares with 70% in the previous year. The data for 2022 shows an increase in the number of children being taken into care in the primary age range with a noticeable reduction of secondary aged pupils going into care. This may be a result of the multi-systemic team (MST) approach that is being implemented within Children's Services and supports those on the edge of care to remain at home which tends to focus on the secondary age range.

Specific funding to support improved outcomes for 'looked after' children comes in the form of the Pupil Development Grant which is overseen by GwE at a regional level. Schools are required to operate in clusters and bid for funding, with the bids being overseen by local officers. This year, the funding has been targeted at a range of training and interventions, including:
- Development of a Sensory Room
- Forest School
- Equine Therapy
- Additional Maths and English tutoring

The Digital Development Portrait screening tool was used with the CLA cohort with the purpose of getting a baseline measure against areas such as Concentration and Focus, Sensory Needs, Social Skills and Emotional Resilience. This enabled education practitioners to understand strengths and areas in need of support/development. The training for staff using the tool has also included information on the neuroscience behind trauma and brain development to facilitate greater understanding of the impact of trauma and the positive strategies that can be undertaken to support

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development. The service is has also undertaken significant work in relation to the Welsh Government virtual school model. This has identified several priorities for improvement and work is underway to explore these with colleagues in Children's Services.

Attendance data for the CLA cohort is 85.5%, compared with 87% for the previous year. Exclusion levels are high with a total of 229.5 days being lost to education. This information has fed into the Council's decision to focus on supporting and developing trauma-informed practice across our schools with the aim of improving understanding of the impact of trauma and suitable strategies to implement to reduce the need for exclusion. The destination data for Year 11 pupils who are 'looked after' indicated that 85% of the cohort went on to access a Post-16 placement compared with 69% in the previous year.

Engagement Services

The Council has a number of services which support and promote engagement, including the Education Welfare Service, Progression Team and Community Focused Schools. There have been several changes made to this area during the reporting period. This has included a review of the EOTAS Panel which now operates as decision making body as opposed to a monitoring remit. The Inclusion & Progression Service saw the cessation of the TRAC programme which had been a European Social Funded provision to support engagement but also saw the development of a Community Focused School Service funded by Welsh Government (WG).

Education Welfare Service (EWS)
The structure of the EWS was reorganised from September 2022 to differentiate the roles between the Education Support Officers (ESO) and the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) with regards to attendance matters. ESOs have been allocated all of the primary school referrals leaving more operational time for the EWO staff based in the secondary schools to respond to the more complex issues. In addition, ESOs have supported several primary schools with regards to attendance systems, processes and monitoring to ensure all attempts are made to maximise attendance. ESOs have made regular visits to conduct attendance meetings with Headteachers and advise on the graduated response to attendance. The responsibility for safeguarding matters in primary schools remains with the more senior EWOs.

Regular profiling of attendance data is now in place within the service to confirm schools in need of support. A positive example of this targeted work is the improvement from 76.8% to 86.2% for one of our primary schools for the academic year 2021/22. The ESO provided a dedicated audit and support for the school's attendance officer and the school is now employing the graduated response to attendance resulting in the positive change. Transition between Year 6 and 7 was also identified as a priority following a review of the data. An initial pilot working with pupils with attendance below 85% in one of the high schools was implemented which resulted in an overall improvement in attendance levels and will be targeted across all schools in the future.

The service has commenced the implementation of fixed penalty notices (FPN) and court proceedings as appropriate, following the guidance on this from WG. A designated ESO has been allocated to administer the FPN process to ensure compliance; any unpaid fines were referred for legal action and resulted in either a fine ranging from £120 to £811 or a conditional discharge in one instance. The cases progressed to date have been cases with chronic levels of non-attendance and the impact of this has been variable. It is anticipated that this ongoing action will lead to a greater awareness of parents of their duties with regards to school attendance and possible consequences, leading to increased levels of engagement in the coming years.

Elective Home Education (EHE)

In line with other councils, Flintshire continues to see an increase in the numbers of children becoming EHE with 178 children registered in January 2023 compared with 91 in 2018. The lead

officer for EHE is actively engaging in the national meetings and is working in collaboration with other regional leads to develop a co-ordinated approach across North Wales. The additional funding received from Welsh Government has enabled the appointment of a designated officer for EHE who provides information and advice and engages proactively with parents who wish their child to be educated at home. An information pack is circulated and annual visits are undertaken as part of the monitoring process. Officers work closely with colleagues across Social Services as required where safeguarding is deemed to be a concern and work proactively to secure a return to school where this is considered to be in the child's best interests. A total of 27 children returned to school-based education in the period January 2022 to January 2023. This compares with 26 in the previous year indicating there is a consistent drive to promote and support re-engagement at any point within a child's educational career.

Community Focused Schools (CFS)

Flintshire received funding to support the implementation of the Community Focused Schools initiative. The decision was taken to retain the funding centrally and develop a team to target the areas with the highest levels of deprivation. Two managers have been appointed along with 6 Family Engagement Workers. The areas of Saltney, Holywell and Queensferry have been identified for access to this intervention. A community hub has been established in St David's High School to support collaboration between the school and the service. This service is in its infancy but it is hoped that it will contribute to an increase in attendance levels in the targeted areas.

Progression Team

The Engagement Progression Coordinator (EPC) works with a range of partners to co-ordinate support for pupils between the ages of 11 and 18 who are potentially at risk of disengagement or are currently not in education, employment or training (NEET). The EPC manages the Progression Team who support the potential NEETS. The team receive referrals for pupils who are starting to, or have disengaged from education from Education Welfare Officers or schools. The EPC also facilitates links with other relevant services such as Youth Justice, Sorted Drug and Alcohol Team and the Young Person's Counselling Service.

Home visits are made by the Progression Team to build rapport and explore the pupils' interests and needs. This engagement work supports pupils to participate in a range of alternative education activities. Support for transition between school and Post-16 provision remains a priority for the team. A total of 250 individuals were supported during the reporting period. The majority (75%) of these individuals were on roll at a school but struggling to engage due to high levels of anxiety and/or presenting behaviours. The service supports individuals to access a range of accreditation to support their transition into adulthood. These include a range of Agored qualifications in areas such as Mental Health & Wellbeing, Independent Living Skills and understanding Healthy Relationships, ASDAN Hair & Beauty, a range of Essential Skills and Sports/Coaching awards. The Prince's Trust Achieve awards have also been accessed in areas such as Personal Development and Employability. Of the 48 Year 11 learners who engaged with the team, all progressed to a positive Post-16 outcome, either in the form of further training or employment.

The level of year 11 NEET has remained low over the past 4 years as a result of the targeted multi-agency work across the authority, underpinned by the work of the EPC and the Progression Team.

Table 11: Year 11 Leavers (%) from schools in Wales known to be not in education, employment or training (NEET)

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Flintshire	1.7 (28)	1.4 (23)	1.2 (19)	1.9 (28)
Wales	2.1 (664)	1.6 (507)	1.7 (527)	1.8 (537)

Table 12: Year 12 and 13 Leavers (%) in Flintshire known not to be in education, employment or training (NEET)

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Flintshire Year 12	1.2 (7)	0.3 (2)	1.1 (6)	0
Wales Yr 12	0.7 (80)	0.4 (55)	0.6 (76)	0.8 (99)
Flintshire Year 13	2.9 (16)	3.4 (19)	3.7 (20)	2.9 (16)
Wales Yr 13	2.8 (322)	2.3 (251)	3.5 (355)	2.5 (269)

Source: Careers Wales

Emotional Health and Wellbeing

Flintshire has an established multi-agency Emotional Health and Wellbeing forum to oversee and guide its response to emotional health and wellbeing. The group is chaired by the Principal Education Psychologist and the forum identifies training needs and prioritises the allocation of the WG Wellbeing grant. The Council continues to promote and develop a relational approach to practice and intervention across its services and schools. Training on Trauma Informed Practice for the Council's senior and middle managers in the Education & Youth Portfolio has taken place and this was also accessed by some secondary Headteachers and senior leaders. A secondary focus group has also been established to further promote and embed this practice across our schools.

Feedback from the training has been positive with a high percentage of participants indicating that the courses offered would lead to a positive impact on their work with children. The Education Psychology Service leads on the supervision/follow up support with the aim of developing and embedding practice. Following the circulation of the Serious Incident policy and the sad need for schools to respond to a number of tragic scenarios, the need for additional training on suicide was identified and delivered as outlined below. The ELSA programme remains a training priority, with a number of additional staff engaging in the training programme which will complete at the end of the academic year 2022/23.

Table 13: Training offered to support Emotional Health & Wellbeing

Training/support	Number of staff trained
ELSA Supervision	80
Emotion Coaching (schools) (PRU) (Welsh Medium)	161 30 7
Emotionally Based School Avoidance	1 high school staff team
Child Bereavement UK: Supporting Children Bereaved by Suicide (2 training day offers)	31
Introduction to the Establish Maintain Restore Relational Approach Model Training Plas Derwen	All staff 30
Nurture Programme Sylvia Lucas	42
Whole School Nurture Approach for Learning Training	6 schools in total
Feelings Detectives	29

In September 2021 the Education Portfolio introduced the 'Challenging Bullying online reporting system' for Flintshire schools. This was developed by Flintshire IT and hosted on the 'Flintshire Workspace' platform. It enables schools to report incidents of bullying, including racist incidents, on an online form and maintain these in one place and update as required. 'Challenging Bullying' sits alongside health and safety incident reporting on the platform and staff illness absence. Designated officers have access to this data which enables the Education Portfolio to maintain an overview of recorded bullying incidents in order to identify emerging trends or groups being discriminated against, monitor exclusion rates. Long term, as the system embeds, the aim is that the data will show progress towards the Council's equality objectives.

Early Help Hub (EHH)

In early 2017 the Flintshire Public Service Board (PSB) commissioned the establishment of an Early Help Hub to support the delivery of more timely and appropriate early intervention and support for families with greater needs. There were multiple drivers for this including the introduction of the Social Service and Wellbeing Act 2014, the CSSIW inspection report recommendations about prioritising early intervention, intervening earlier at lower cost and for better outcomes and the extent to which so many cases being referred and re-referred to Children's Services did not meet thresholds for a statutory intervention, notwithstanding that the families often presented with persistent challenges.

Since inception in 2017 Flintshire's Early Help hub model has continued to develop and adapt to the ever-changing circumstances and landscape of support needed across the county. The Early Help Hub is now a well-established provision prioritizing early intervention for families, receiving approximately 12,611 referrals since inception, the highest proportion being request for support for families with a 10–15-year-olds. There are a total of 16 agencies including health, education, police, housing and third sector representatives participating in hub discussions and actioning support to ensure families receive services at the point struggles start to emerge in their family journey.

All services participating utilise the Paris system to record information allowing quick escalation if a concern comes to light as part of hub information gathering and an efficient step-down process for families where child protection is not the most appropriate route. This has dramatically decreased the number of 'No Further Action' decisions (NFA's) and all families receive an offer of support. Recent work through Vanguard has united and streamlined the 'front door' processes for Children's Services and Early Intervention and work is currently being undertaken to ensure a what matters conversation is held with families at the point of referral, ensuring the families voice is at the heart of any decision-making process. To further develop family voice in late 2022 a series of workshops were set up with partner agencies alongside senior management, parents and young people to see if we could integrate some of our colleagues (the experts) into a single front door which support families by identifying needs (What Matters) upon entry into children's services and without delay.

The Information Advice and Assistance Service provides a swift response in supporting our front door statutory partners, including schools, police, health and early years to fulfil the role when families are requiring support when thresholds are not met from statutory resource. The IAA Service was developed in late 2022 and became operational in February 2023. The Information, advice and assistance service (IAA) is providing support to families through skilled conversations which will clarify people's thoughts and explore their dilemmas to understand "What Matters" most to them and how best to help them.

Referrals that do not meet threshold for safeguarding will be passed to IAA Service. Each representative will contact the family to explore their dilemmas to understand "What Matters" to them and how best to help them by giving information, providing advice or providing assistance.

Nominated staff from the Education and Youth portfolio have remained a consistent and integral part of the offer, evolving from one education representative to the current inclusion of the Education Welfare Team. This has facilitated a wider dissemination of the knowledge shared as part of the process to schools and their wider partners and enabled comprehensive sharing of information. The team disseminate valuable information about families and their needs enabling an appropriate and effective support package to be identified, as well as providing a valuable conduit to support often linking families and encouraging engagement with the identified services. All referrals receive an action, whether that be a single service provision, multiple service or voluntary sector information support. This is an innovative and highly effective model of support that is having a tangible impact on children and families.

2.3 Other Education Support Services

Funded Part Time Early Years Provision – Early Entitlement

Flintshire has a long tradition of supporting early years' education and during 2022-23 had 45 non-maintained settings registered to deliver part time, early education for three-year-olds and 32 schools supporting 710 children in total. Provision is for 10 hours of funded education per week.

Despite the removal of the grant conditions by Welsh Government to provide '10%' teacher time for funded settings and reducing central resources, the Council continues to maintain appropriate levels of support to settings registered for early education delivery to ensure high quality standards of provision, which in turn leads to better outcomes for learners. A central team of early years specialists work across the settings to provide targeted role modelling of teaching, to develop quality learning environments and support setting staff to produce robust self-evaluation reports and improvement action plans.

The core team is also supported in this delivery by several early years' teachers in schools, funded by the Council, where the local playgroup is the main feeder into the school nursery class. Initially developed as a strategy to maintain delivery in the face of reducing budgets and recruitment restrictions, there have been other intended benefits of this approach such as improved transition arrangements for pupils and sharing of best practice. However, the school-based teachers have acknowledged their reliance on the Council's core EE team who are real experts in provision for 3-year-olds. All support teachers produce pre-inspection reports on settings and assist with post-inspection action plans. Where settings require follow up after an inspection, particularly in the more significant categories, then the level of support is increased.

The Council still has sufficient capacity to deliver the number of early education places required. As an early implementer of the Welsh Government's 30-hour Free Childcare Offer, many settings have registered as joint providers so this additional funding provides some mitigation in the sector. The Welsh Government acknowledged the pressure on settings to maintain a combined delivery of early years' education and childcare with a difference in funding rates. This resulted in WG using Flintshire as a pilot authority for the provision of additional funding to equalise the rates of payment.

Flintshire continues to work closely with Mudiad Meithrin, the Welsh-medium early years' organisation, to develop new Welsh language provision in key geographical locations in the county as part of its Welsh in Education Strategy (WESP). There is currently sufficient capacity to deliver Welsh medium early years' education, but the aim is to increase this as a stepping stone to more children accessing their full-time education in a Welsh medium school and support the WG target of 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050. A new Cylch developed by Mudiad Meithrin opened in May 2019 in Buckley and this is part of a longer-term strategy through the WESP and WG capital funding schemes to create a new Welsh medium primary school provision in the Buckley/Mynydd Isa area.

The Early Years Pupil Development Grant (EYPDG) continues to be used by the Early Entitlement Team (EET) for the professional development of the non-maintained workforce with a focus on strengthening staff impact on the engagement, well-being and performance of disadvantaged learners.

The support provided for an EE child with developmental delays or difficulties traditionally takes place within the setting. The EET offer advice to setting staff on strategies that they can use with the child. Support for children with developmental delays or difficulties is an area which the EET is focusing on in partnership with Childcare Services and the Inclusion Service in order to create a more integrated process for requesting and receiving support under the new ALNET Act (Wales).

The EE Service has increased the ALNCo's level of involvement with setting staff and the impact has been that there are now more structured approaches to offering strategies for supporting individual EE children identified as having particular needs. Feedback on this increased specialised input indicates that staff feel the strategies are having a positive impact on the child/children's engagement in learning.

The EET works in partnership with Flying Start, the Childcare Development Team and the Inclusion Service to agree an ALN training programme for the non-maintained sector. EET work cooperatively with Social Services teams to identify a range of resources suitable for supporting children's speech, language and physical skills. EET worked in partnership with the Early Years Pathfinder Project to identify opportunities for extending good practice in Flying Start settings into EE settings which resulted in the piloting of 'Wellcomm' - a speech and language screening tool.

Regionally the EET continues to work in partnership with other North Wales EE Teams and the EE Team Leader attends local and regional meetings supporting ALN transformation work. On a national level EET members continue to support the work of Estyn through their stakeholder meetings and support Welsh Government's working parties on the implementation of the new curriculum and assessment arrangements.

The non-maintained sector continues to experience a high turnover of staff, and this is being exacerbated by the national difficulty in recruiting childcare workers. The Early Entitlement Team are regularly providing training to some staff with no prior knowledge of how to meet the demands of education, rather than solely childcare provision, as well as providing professional development in the delivery of a new curriculum and assessment arrangements.

Over the last few years, the focus of the Early Entitlement team's training has been on supporting non-maintained settings with the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales. Since January 2022 the focus has more specifically been on the delivery of the 'Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings'. The team completed three evaluation reports to Welsh Government (January 2022, May 2022 and January 2023) focusing on the progress being made with the implementation of Curriculum for Wales in funded non-maintained nursery settings within Flintshire. As part of this, Flintshire was asked to write a case study on its support for non-maintained settings to be shared across Wales and published on Hwb.

The Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards (RRRS) Grant provided by Welsh Government for the non-maintained sector since 2021 and administered by the local authority, enabled the Early Entitlement Team to fund training delivered by experts in the field of early years, to provide release costs for staff attendance at training and to purchase high quality resources which support the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales. The grant also enabled Early Entitlement to fund professional learning hours for staff supporting funded education in settings. Feedback from Flintshire settings is that this has been a very valuable use of the funding and that staff's understanding of the new curriculum has increased because of this additional capacity and access to

professional development

Early Entitlement Teams across North Wales have a strong history of working in partnership and in autumn 2022 agreed a joint approach to piloting the draft assessment arrangements in non-maintained funded settings. The final arrangements were released in July 2023 and Flintshire will support settings to implement these during the next academic year.

Integrated Youth Provision – Youth and Play Services including Play Sufficiency

Play services have been embedded into Flintshire's Integrated Youth Provision (IYP) since 2017. The Council has a strong tradition of providing safe spaces and quality play opportunities for young children during summer holidays. This also includes Welsh language provision. The service has an excellent track record in partnership working with over 30 Town and Community Councils to deliver these quality play schemes in over 50 locations. In 2022, 3975 children attended a scheme recording 15,556 total attendances. The schemes also offer employment for the young Flintshire workforce (Majority aged 18 – 25) and supports the workforce development target for the Council. Over the past 12 months the Play and Youth teams have been establishing more sustainable and long-term play provision, focussing on transition activity.

Flintshire County Council upholds Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 which places a statutory duty on all local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children, and to consider the many aspects of community life that affect play opportunities e.g. use of the environment; traffic and transport; play and leisure provision, and parental and community involvement with play. Flintshire is effective in adhering to the statutory guidance, 'Wales – A Play Friendly Country'.

In early 2023 the executive summary of the latest play sufficiency assessment was produced along with a self-assessment and action plan. In order to move the plan to action a multi-agency strategic group will need to be formed and will be a key action for 2023-24.

The play development delivery staff continue to engage a range of statutory and non-statutory partners and this has enhanced the inclusive range of opportunities, such as working specifically on traveller sites to provide and enhance play opportunities as well as continuing successful programmes such as Kicks for Kids Football, Shed Project Play, Forest Schools and a drama project with Theatr Clwyd Cymru.

To improve monitoring and performance, the registration and general administration for the summer programme has been switched online, thus allowing for efficient reporting against key indicators as well as swift communication with key partners such as Corporate Health and Safety and Town and Community Councils.

The Integrated Youth Provision Team deliver a diverse range of targeted and open access activities across Flintshire, both directly, and through working in collaboration with a range of statutory, non-statutory and voluntary organisations. Core council funding for the service is supplemented by Welsh Government grant funding streams e.g. Youth Support Grant and Families First Grant.

The service delivers traditional club-based activity as well as detached youth work, school immersion work, Welsh language provision, homelessness prevention, a Forest School, Duke of Edinburgh Scheme, a Resilience Programme, LGBTQ+ Youth Club and the Youth Council. The provision of digital services will continue to be developed to enhance the service and to ensure that all young people have access to support. In an average month the service records over 1900 attendances delivering 278 hours of provision.

Provision for youth services is planned in conjunction with partners, such as Aura Leisure and Libraries, NEWCIS Young Carers, the Urdd and Theatre Clwyd. The service has been innovative in supporting Aura staff to upskill and achieve Level 2 and 3 youth work qualifications as part of the doorstep sport provision and is currently co-designing a bespoke introduction to youth work course for local clubs and organisations working with young people. The service has provided grants to partners to support delivery across Flintshire and/or, for the benefit of Flintshire residents e.g. to Newcis Young Carers. The service also supports the Inspire Project in partnership with Wrexham County Borough Council to provide bespoke youth support services those young people who self-harm or are at risk of suicide ideation. There is a longstanding partnership with Theatr Clwyd which has resulted in powerful interactive drama opportunities for young people to explore key issues such as consent.

Internally, regular meetings occur with the Youth Justice Service and Sorted (Drug and Alcohol Team), to share insights and maximise resources, as well as with other partnerships e.g. groups commissioned via the Families First funding. IYP is also a key member of the Flintshire VARM/ASB partnership, a multi-agency group tasked with identifying and reducing anti-social behaviour and police demand through a collaborative approach. This enables the service to effectively target its intervention work through its detached work team in particular communities as needs arise.

In the past 12 months refugees from both Afghanistan and the Ukraine have attended the Forest School provision and have taken part in a range of activities and created networking and social opportunities for young people and also their parents/carers.

Wrexham Glyndwr University have temporarily paused their degree programme for new students. Although this will not have an immediate impact on the service, it has the potential to be damaging in the medium term with the natural turnover and anticipated growth of the service. The Senior Manager will take an active role in the reinvigoration of the degree ensuring that it meets the needs of the industry. Level 2 and 3 qualifications continue to be delivered primarily through Adult Learning Wales and the service has continued to support new staff through this route. To improve our local service, we are in the process of training an in-house tutor. In early 2023 IYP successfully recruited two Youth Work apprentices.

The Youth Service previously held the overall Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) Licence and has now worked successfully with schools to   support all 12 of Flintshire's secondary schools and the Pupil Referral unit to take out their own licence. The Youth Service will continue to operate their own licence for the Silver and Gold Award as well as supporting Aura Leisure. Being able to offer the Gold Award is a focus for the forthcoming year.

Young people's voices are continuously canvassed and the service has amended its provision where appropriate to reflect their opinions. The service has been as flexible and reactive in provision wherever possible to ensure it could respond quickly to changing need/priorities. The service also supports partners with their consultations, e.g. the Children's Commissioner's Office where two schools were consulted about their racism experiences and also supported the Youth Justice Service to produce a Young Person Friendly version of the Youth Justice Plan. A priority remains to reinvigorate the Youth Council.

The Inspire Pride group, established during the pandemic, continues to run and any young person working with Inspire from Flintshire can attend the group which has now transitioned to face to face delivery. A partnership between Integrated Youth Provision and Theatre Clwyd was established and a LGBTQ+ group was created after a consultation event with young people in April 2022. The group runs fortnightly on alternative Tuesdays to Inspire sessions so LGBTQ+ young people have access to a range of groups.

In addition to the core youth provision of clubs and detached work in communities, the service has also

embedded School and Community Immersion Youth Workers in five secondary schools including Welsh medium, which provide specialist youth service interventions in the areas of Mental Health, Sexual Health, Relationships, Child Sexual Exploitation and Modern Slavery. The support ranges from group sessions and 1 to 1 sessions, and also focuses on mental health and wellbeing, anger management, anti-bullying and respecting others, building confidence and self -esteem, relationships and stress and anxiety support and resilience along with lunch time drop-in sessions and signposting to other services. The team also provide community work, supporting young people in their school and community settings and any crossover issues are managed i.e. community cohesion, anti-social behaviour, bullying (often involving social media). This community work has also included drop-in sessions to facilitate parents voicing their opinions, issues and concerns to the youth work team and source advice. At one Flintshire high school, the School and Community Immersion Worker supports a project working in partnership with the Portfolio's Inclusion Team and school staff to work positively with students on improving behaviour and attendance, to improve engagement and pupil outcomes.

The IYP team continue to run a Transition Support resource for students in years 6, 7 and 8 students in response to evidence that these learners were struggling the most, having missed out on face-to-face transition activities for the move from primary to secondary education during the pandemic.

In the county's only Welsh medium high school, young people received support directly from the service through its Welsh Language Immersion Worker in response to students' feelings of isolation and poor mental health. These sessions encouraged students to express other concerns about sexuality and homophobia and the service responded proactively by commissioning other specialist organisations to provide information and other support mechanisms to young people with the support of the school.

A new monitoring, evaluation and learning tool was introduced in Spring 2023. This will allow for a greater level of performance monitoring and planning across the range of services offered. In addition to collecting attendance data, it will also monitor topics covered, levels of engagement, case studies, session notes and evaluations, and consultations with service users. The mapping system will also add to our existing insight to ensure that our services are targeted in areas of most need.

This level of activity clearly demonstrates the responsive and wide-ranging services provided to Flintshire's young people over the last twelve months and how interventions have been tailored to meet specific needs alongside universal provision.

Youth Justice Services & Flintshire Sorted

During 2022-2023 The Youth Justice Service (YJS) supported 147 children and young people, a reduction in 27 young people compared with the previous year. 80% of the interventions delivered were at a pre-court stage. Our cohort composition has remained relatively unchanged from the previous 12 months with 79% male and 21% female, with the most prominent age of children and young people entering the Youth Justice system between the ages of 14-17 years.

The Youth Justice Board continues to monitor disproportionality within the criminal justice system and based on their current disproportionality toolkit, Flintshire YJS's ethnic minority group composition represents 4% of our total cohort, which is marginally higher than the composition of the wider 10–17-year-old population in Flintshire. The service is being proactive in monitoring current trends and has developed a Disproportionality Action Plan to give greater focus to this issue.

The service is committed to promoting the voice of children and young people and in the last 12 months most children and young people open to the YJS have provided a positive assessment of the work of the service. As part of our assessment and planning process, the service also seeks a child's individual views on their aspirations and areas of their life. Based on self-reporting of 88 children and

young people, following YJS intervention, they reported positive gains in most areas of their lives.

All young people involved within the YJS undergo a comprehensive holistic assessment which assesses their likelihood of re-offending, risk of serious harm to others in addition to their safety and wellbeing needs. This also includes issues and concerns relating to education, training and employment, physical health and emotional and mental health. The services remains concerned about the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on our children and young people. A cohort analysis of 106 children and young people open to the YJS in the last 12 months has highlighted;

* YJS Assessments identified emotional and mental health needs in 67% of children and young people, an increase of 6% since 2021

* 24% had a physical health need, an increase of 6% in the last 12 months

* Whilst Alcohol consumption had decreased by 4% affecting 37% of children and young people, drug consumption increased by 14% in the last 12 months affecting 67% of children and young people,

* Additional Learning Needs were present in 74% of our cases, 33 % had a current or previous exclusion from school, whereas 48% had behavioural issues in school and 41% reported attendance issues.

In response, the service remains committed to strengthening our partnership with Public Health Wales and Wrexham Glyndwr University and are committed to becoming a trauma informed service. Additionally, we have increased our support available to parents and have commenced a review with health colleagues into YJS resourcing, pathways and training to support our cohort. We continue through our partnership with the Forensic Adolescent Treatment Service (FACTS) to embed trauma informed approaches through Enhanced Case Management and have continued to train staff to become trauma informed. The Service has also utilised Ministry of Justice funding for 'Turnaround' to provide additional resources to intervene with children and young people at earlier stages of the criminal justice system utilising a 'what matters' and trauma informed approach.

Whilst the YJS does not have a statutory obligation to provide Education, Training, and Employment (ETE), the service facilitates access to education through assessment and signposting/referral and will provide cohort information to Education colleagues to ensure a cross-portfolio approach. All children and young people entering the YJS are assessed by a dedicated Education Support Worker who will assess and highlight any attendance or additional support needs and will inform the relevant YJS and Education colleagues to ensure that appropriate support plans are in place. Attendance is also monitored at monthly YJS ETE Panels and information is shared with colleagues within Education, local colleges and Careers Wales in order to support and address attendance and access to education, training and employment.

The YJS is also a standing member on the Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) panel which provides opportunities for the service to raise the needs of children and young people open to them who are experiencing difficulties in school attendance and engagement. In April 2023 the Youth Justice Board also introduced new Key Performance Indicators that will request YJS assess the suitability and provide data on ALN provision for our children and young people. The Education and Youth Senior Management Team have been exploring mechanisms to provide oversight to children and young people who may not be accessing suitable education that meets their needs.

The three-year Youth Justice Plan is committed to the following priorities:

* Increasing school attendance and reducing exclusion and increasing oversight and understanding of barriers linked to attendance

- Increasing the range of ETE opportunities for children and young people

- Strengthening our engagement with Additional Learning Needs Services

- Developing opportunities for children and young people to develop their aspirations through skills and activities and alternative qualification networks.

YJS reports ETE performance to the Youth Justice Board and local performance frameworks on a quarterly basis. The YJB National Performance indicator only looks at those young people whose cases have closed in the reporting period, but from April 2023 reporting will extend to those open on Out of Court Disposals in addition to statutory Court Orders

The Service has also developed a Youth Violence Action Plan to address violent offending within its cohort. Whilst the number of assaults against the person have decreased over all in the last 12 months, Serious Violent offences (over a specific gravity rating) have seen a small increase. Despite these offences making up a minority of our total offences, the YJS sees this as a key priority for the next 12 months. The YJS remains part of the Police and Crime Commissioner's Serious Violence Duty Task and Finish Group and is closely aligning our Action Plan to wider regional priorities.

Within the last 12 months the YJS has seen an increase in the use or remand and custody. Between 2018-2021, 2 custodial outcomes were issued by the Court, however, since April 2021 the YJS has had 2 incidents of remand and 4 custodial sentences linked to 3 young people. We have assessed that a number of factors may have contributed to this increase including the seriousness of offending, non-engagement on community orders and difficulties within the wider social care sector to secure appropriate community based alternative placements to support children and young people. In response we have developed a reducing custody action plan which will closely align us to planned work around commissioning within the Social Care Sector and Social Services Department.

Flintshire Sorted (Young People's Drug and Alcohol Team) aims to prevent substance use and to minimise the impact of substance use on children and young people, families and the community. It provides a universal, targeted and specialist service to children and young people up to the age of 25 years.

Flintshire Sorted delivers a universal and targeted service within every secondary school in the County with the overall aim of diverting young people away from the use of drugs and alcohol. The targeted content aims to promote healthy choices, challenge attitudes to drugs, anti-social behaviour and other risky behaviours, and strengthen protective factors. Flintshire Sorted provide universal delivery via awareness raising of the risk of using substances through the PSE (Personal, Social, Education) curriculum in schools and via outreach delivery within the community. Flintshire Sorted offer a referral-based service for more intensive work with young people whose substance misuse is having a negative impact on their lives. A range of therapeutic interventions is offered to meet the individual needs of young people and help them to make changes and lead healthier lifestyles. The service also provides a consultation service for parents and professionals who may have questions about suspected substance use in their children.

Between April 2022 and March 2023:

- 694 sessions were held in 13 secondary schools and colleges

- 5226 young people were engaged in these sessions

- 59 Community Outreach sessions delivered engaging 1693 people

- Drug and Alcohol Community Support Sessions took place with trained staff attending identified hotspots for anti-social behaviour where substances were an issue. The staff offered support and advice to young people at risk of offending and provided targeted support session to individuals and groups. They were also able to direct young people to specialist services

- 253 young people received a targeted intervention

- 73% of young people reported that they had met their goals i.e. had gained more knowledge substances, understood the long-term effects of drugs, and/or had quit alcohol or smoking.

- 269 young people were referred to the service for specialist Tier 3 assessment and intervention.

- 118 professionals received training from Flintshire Sorted. These included: Social Workers, School Nurses, Residential Children Home staff, Safeguarding practitioners, Adult Substance Misuse Service practitioners.

- 81% of young people reported that they had met their goals i.e. had gained more knowledge of substances, understood the long-term effects of drugs, and/or had quit alcohol or smoking.

Healthy Schools & Healthy Pre-Schools

The Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes (WNHSS) is an example of a 'settings' based approach to health promotion. Settings based approaches are universal approaches seeking to influence the environment, policy and practice to enable better health and wellbeing of those in a setting. WNHSS was launched in September 1999, as a national framework. It is a network of 22 local healthy school schemes, with national and local responsibilities. The aim of the WNHSS is to support schools to become health promoting institutions in line with national healthy schools' criteria. Indicators for the WNHSS National Quality Award (NQA), were issued in 2010. The scheme was established in Flintshire in 2002 and works in partnership with local and national organisations to ensure a coordinated and multi-faceted approach to health within schools.

Public Health Wales (PHW) identified that the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes requires significant reform to optimise its potential in supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people in the future. Work started on reviewing the scheme in 2019 however this was delayed by the pandemic and work to complete recommendations identified in the review remained on hold until June 2021. The work was then recommenced by the national health improvement team. In Autumn 2022, PHW proposed a reform to the architecture of the programme to move away from 22 schemes towards a single all-Wales framework. Local delivery and ownership would continue but supported by a single benchmark and framework of what is considered effective practice, as part of a continuous improvement model. This reform would bring together both WNHSS and the Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing Framework (WSAEMWB) which are currently running as two separate workstreams with significant overlap. The timeframe for the proposed relaunch of the scheme is Spring 2024.

Despite the pause on the accreditation aspect of the scheme since the start of the pandemic, the Flintshire Healthy Schools team in 2022-2023 remained focused on supporting schools in addressing the following three local priorities for health and wellbeing:

1. Whole Schools Approach to Emotional Health and mental wellbeing (WSA)
2. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)
3. Food and Nutrition

Whole School Approach to Emotional Health and Mental Wellbeing: The Flintshire Healthy Schools

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team have been supporting schools to complete the WSA self-assessment tool to provide a current baseline of wellbeing provision for pupils and staff in their school and action plan accordingly. In Flintshire, 82.1% of schools are currently engaged with this process; higher than the Wales average of 52%. 67% of schools have completed the self-assessment tool in Flintshire in comparison with the Wales average of 42.5%. These schools are now developing their action plans. Support will remain ongoing for all schools as they work through this process.

<u>Relationships and Sexuality Education:</u> The Flintshire Healthy Schools team have been supporting schools to meet the requirements of the RSE Code / Curriculum for Wales. Historically RSE has been a theme within the Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Schemes criteria addressed under the banner of 'personal development and relationships'. At a local level, officers supported most schools in the county to deliver a programme of sex and relationships education in line with the previous government guidance. They supported schools by commissioning experts in the field, sourcing training and resources, policy development and establishing platforms to share information.

For many schools, the introduction of the RSE Code has meant reviewing what they have delivered previously and refining the content to ensure it is developmentally appropriate; and enhancing this provision further to ensure all the mandatory content is met. A comprehensive programme of staff training for RSE has been fundamental to raise teachers' confidence with this area of the curriculum over the last two years.

RSE leads in Flintshire primary and secondary schools were invited to attend 3 workshops delivered online between Jan-April 2022 by an independent provider working across the GwE region. Staff from 49 primary schools attended the workshops. An additional briefing session summarising the previous workshops was delivered in September 2022 for schools that did not attend / or required additional staff training. Staff from 22 primary schools were in attendance. The secondary workshops were attended by RSE leads from 9 secondaries, 1 special school and 1 PRU. The small number of schools that have not accessed training have received access to these resources when support for RSE has been sought.

In 21/22 and 22/23, a pilot of an integrated scheme of learning for personal, social and health education was carried out, of which RSE is a key feature. This was funded through the Welsh Government's Wellbeing grant. 11 schools in year 1 and a further 16 schools in year 2 accessed the scheme and provided very positive feedback. Staff from 13 of the schools attended one of two RSE focused training sessions delivered. Workshops 'working towards an inclusive school' were held in January 2023 for RSE leads in primaries to explore how information is presented, values and beliefs around gender and identity and why these matter. Staff from 27 schools attended. Refresher training for the existing 'Tyfu i Fyny' / 'Growing Up' resources used by many primary schools was also delivered in Feb-March 2023 with attendance by staff from 29 schools. A face-to-face course was held in February 2023 to give guidelines to secondary RSE leads with the opportunity to practice skills and increase confidence.

As part of the RSE training, information about the period dignity grant has also been included and has supported teachers to be better informed about menstruation and be familiar with the sanitary products available. Training about reusable / disposable products has been delivered to equip staff with the tools and confidence to support learners in making the right choices for them. Courses were delivered Jan- March 2023 with attendance from 18 primary/ secondary schools.

All training is evaluated, and there has been a positive response by schools to the training programme offered this year. Feedback is utilised to make improvements to the training programme

as required. In most cases this relates to what further training schools would benefit from. For example, sexual health and LGBTQ+ have been identified as themes many schools identified as requiring further support and the team ensured these were featured within the programme of professional development offered. 4 secondary schools have also been funded to begin working on the Rainbow Award (delivered by the Proud Trust) and the Healthy Schools team coordinated the first Flintshire secondary schools 'Celebrating being me' event during pride month. 233 young people completed anonymous qualitive evaluations and the language used by 100% of the young people was positive. Examples of the comments made by young people that attended included:

"I have enjoyed the fun stalls and learning about different charities. This was important to me because I now understand that I finally fit in somewhere and I'm not alone".

"Today has been amazing and I have enjoyed it so much. I feel okay to be me when I'm here. Thank you".

"I appreciate the support and consideration for mental health. I feel seen and heard."

"Amazing event! It's lovely to see so many people alike come together and celebrate DIVERSITY".

The secondary PSE / Healthy Schools forum continues to meet on a regular basis attended by representatives from all secondary schools including Special and PRU. A follow up to the workshops held in spring term 2022 was undertaken at the December 22 meeting to identify how schools were progressing in planning their RSE programmes and this continues to be a regular agenda item at meetings. RSE training in 2023-2024 will be delivered through the cluster model.

Food and Nutrition: Work has been undertaken with secondary schools in reviewing the existing food provision in line with the Welsh Government regulations. In partnership with colleagues in NEWydd Catering, two learner events have taken place this year for consultation and engagement. Pupil voice has driven this area of work and the changes that have occurred. Several schools have since reintroduced their school nutrition action groups (SNAGS) following this focus. Examples of changes include clearer pricing on menus and reintroduction of sandwich 'deli' bars in some canteens. A new menu offer with input from learners is being launched in September 2023.

Vaping
Wales, in common with other parts of the United Kingdom and countries internationally is experiencing a rapid increase in reports of young people vaping. The School Health Research Network (SHRN) study showed a marked increase in vaping among young people between 2019/21 and 2021/22. Headteachers and parents, not only in Flintshire but across Wales and the UK, are raising concerns and experiencing significant challenges in managing behaviours around vaping. These include growing reports of addiction to nicotine which is disruptive to day-to-day life and learning. Concerns have been raised about the safety and quality of products and also about the growing presence of illegal products in the marketplace. In response, the Education and Youth Portfolio has developed a model Smoke free policy template. All schools have been provided with clear signage. Primary school headteachers and wellbeing leads in secondary schools have been offered training opportunities.

Co-ordination of Programmes

Healthy & Sustainable Pre-school Scheme (HSPSS): There are 45 settings participating in the scheme in Flintshire. Each setting must demonstrate that it is promoting health and well-being

through its policies, planning and ethos over 7 different health themes. At the end of each theme the setting is locally assessed and once they met the required criteria, they are accredited by PHW. In total 26 settings (58%) have now completed the scheme. During 22/23 there were 9 assessments undertaken: 4 of which were end of scheme assessments and 5 were health theme assessments. For 23/24 we will be actively recruiting more settings.

Food and Fun: The Healthy Schools team have coordinated the Food & Fun programme in Flintshire since it began in 2018. This includes the initial recruitment of schools, stakeholder group meetings, managing funding and direct support for schools prior to the programme beginning, throughout and afterwards.   In 2022, over 280 children and young people aged 5-12 years benefited from Food and Fun in 9 schools in Flintshire, with over 2850 meals served during the 12-day summer holiday programme. All learners and parents are involved in evaluating the scheme. 13 schools (14 cohorts of 40 pupils) are hosting the programme in 2023, with the support of NEWydd catering, Aura Leisure and Libraries and the Dietetics team at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB).

Period Dignity: The Healthy Schools team has overseen the grant expenditure for this national project since it was first issued in 17/18. In 22/23 this continued with the online ordering and delivery of home packs in partnership with an external provider, alongside a wide range of community-based initiatives to make products available, including through food banks, community hubs, youth services and adult community learning providers. Reviews of the online ordering and home delivery service received from the online survey completed by 248 responders (parents and young people) found that overall, the service received a rating of 4.54 out of 5 (5 = very satisfied and 1 = very unsatisfied). Period pants were the most popular products ordered and 61% of responders were very likely to use reusable products in the future. The shipping time for products did fluctuate from between 3-8 weeks and some orders had not arrived at the time of the survey. The stock is imported, and this has led to some delays. 34% of responders did comment at the end of the survey with largely positive feedback about the service and some constructive feedback about sizing of period pants and delivery time.

"Great service for all young girls who are in need of these products and maybe cannot afford! discreet and great service".

"Excellent project which allowed my daughter and I to revisit the conversation about periods, address her fears / feelings etc".

Pupil Voice

The Council is committed to ensuring that the voices of children and young people are reflected in its work and actively seeks their engagement.

Following the introduction of the Framework on Embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Health and Wellbeing, schools are required to complete an assessment tool and develop an implementation plan based on the outcomes. This includes specific indicators where schools need to demonstrate how the whole school community is engaged and involved in day-to-day life of the school in influencing decision making and reviewing progress.

All secondary schools will again be supported to complete the bi-annual School Health Research Network (SHRN) survey in the autumn term of 2023, with data available in the spring term 2024. The School Health Research Network (SHRN) is a partnership between Welsh Government, Public Health Wales (PHW), Cancer Research UK and the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods. It is led by Cardiff University and brings together secondary schools across Wales and academic researchers, policymakers and practitioners from health, education, and social care. The

SHRN aims to improve young people's health and wellbeing in the school setting by providing robust health and wellbeing data for school, regional and national stakeholders. The availability of health behaviour data on both a county and school level are particularly valuable in terms of coordinating the delivery of services and interventions. Previously regular data on children and young people's health at a local level has been limited to the Child Measurement Programme, teenage conception data and the Sport Wales School Sport Survey.

The last SHRN survey was undertaken in 2021 with 7537 young people from Flintshire taking part which is an increase from previous surveys - 6585 in 2017 and 6773 in 2019. Findings from the 2021 survey demonstrated the impact the pandemic had on young people's mental health and wellbeing and all areas of life from screen time to sedentary behaviour. The data for emotions and behaviour in comparison with 2019 indicates at Key Stage 3 there has been an increase in emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, and peer relationships support. At Key Stage 4, data in comparison with 2019 also indicates an increase in emotional symptoms, hyperactivity, and peer relationships support. 43% of young people surveyed have screen time after 11.30pm on a school night, compared to 38% in Wales - a rise of 9% compared to county average of 34% in 2019. 21% of students surveyed spend 7 or more hours sitting down in their free time, compared to 18% in Wales. This is a rise of 4% compared to the county average of 17% in 2019. All secondary schools have action plans in place based on their individual school report and provided with support to identify their priorities. There is a county action plan and monitoring of SHRN county data on a biannual basis.

As part of the statutory processes in the identification of additional learning needs, children and young people are actively supported to contribute as appropriate to their age or stage of development. Youth Justice assessments and plans clearly reference the views and needs of the young person themselves and the Integrated Youth Provision regularly consults with its users and refines its services as a result. A Youth Council was in place prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and is in the process of being refreshed as part of the restructuring of Youth Service provision. It will resume its regular meetings with the Chief Executive, Leader of the Council and Chief Officer for Education & Youth in the Autumn term.

Any proposals for school organisation change include a children's and young person's version of key documentation and council staff facilitate consultations sessions with learners as part of the statutory process and report on their feedback in reports to decision makers.

Sport Wales has coordinated the School Sport Survey for learners in Years 3 to 11 for over twenty years. All schools which collect the required number of survey responses from their learners receive unweighted results in a school report and providing enough schools have participated, the local authority also qualifies for a report. The numbers of learners that have completed the survey has steadily increased from 5090 in 2015, 5208 in 2017, and 5212 responses in 2022. This year 3052 secondary aged learners from 8 secondary schools completed the survey alongside 2160 primary aged learners from 25 primary schools. Schools, supported by the Portfolio, will be expected to share their reports with their School Councils and use the information to secure further improvements in sports and physical activities within their schools.

School Place Planning & Provision including provision for Welsh medium & admissions processes

Flintshire County Council has a strong track record in strategically managing its school estate through both its own resources and through the effective use of grant funding schemes e.g. Sustainable Learning Communities Programme, to manage effective and efficient delivery of school places. It has demonstrated a willingness to take difficult decisions to modernise the school network to improve the quality of the learning environment to underpin teaching and learning and address issues related to

condition and suitability within its school estate.

Under its School Modernisation Strategy the Council has undertaken a major programme of school organisational change proposals which have included the closure of one nursery school, three primary schools, one secondary school, the development of four federal arrangements across the primary and secondary sector, the amalgamation of all infant and junior schools, the rationalisation of post-16 provision in the north of the County resulting in a partnership arrangement with Coleg Cambria, the extension of primary Welsh medium provision, the building of two new primary schools and an award winning 3-16 learning campus and other major remodelling projects. The Sustainable Learning Communities Band A Programme has now been fully completed (on time and within budget) bringing the total investment envelope to £64.2m for this phase of investment.

The Council's Strategic Outline Plan (SOP) for Band B is equally ambitious at £85m and has approval from Welsh Government and the Council's Cabinet. The Council is constantly evaluating its programme priorities and how to use the differing forms of funding available e.g. Capital and Revenue based funding under the Mutual Investment Model (MIM).

The proposed programme provides efficient and effective educational infrastructure to meet current and future demand. The programme has potential to remove up to 10 educational buildings from the service portfolio and ensure suitable investment in new facilities. All projects within the programme will be designed to promote, where applicable, early years' provision and community access to school and sports facilities.

The backlog maintenance for projects within the programme is £7,732,996 for secondary and £1,692,356 for primary. For new school projects, the Council would expect to achieve 100% reduction in backlog maintenance, for large remodelling projects an 80% reduction and smaller scale projects the aim would be for 50% as a benchmark. The Council has clearly defined arrangements for repairs and maintenance of schools and responds appropriately to emergencies.

The SOP is linked to the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. The Band B programme is focused on 3 of the 6 schools within the Welsh Medium (WM) sector, linking in with the Council's desire to ensure that WM is given priority and links into the National Welsh Language Strategy. Further funding opportunities have been identified and secured to build a new start up Welsh Medium Area Primary school to be located in an area of known Welsh medium demand and to serve nearby areas in the Northeast of the county. Other funding opportunities through the Welsh Government community facility and childcare capital grant are also being reviewed to provide capital investment enhancing Welsh medium learning provision.

Voluntary Aided schools are maintained jointly by the County Council and either the Church in Wales or the Roman Catholic Church. Aided schools also have access to separate capital funding streams directly through the Welsh Government. The Council continues to work successfully in partnership with the Diocesan Authorities to ensure that Aided schools are appropriately located and fit for purpose.

In September 2022 the Pupil Level Annual School Census showed the 64 primary schools had a total capacity of 14,123 full time places and had 11,747 total numbers on roll (NOR), which is a surplus of 16.82%. 11 Schools in the secondary sector had a total capacity of 10,718 with 9,716 NOR and 9.35% surplus places. When combined, these figures equate to 13.1% average surplus places across the school network, which is higher than the maximum national target of 10%.

Unfilled places in September 2022 were 3,378. This is an improvement on statistics produced in January 2013, when there were some 4,000 unfilled places in Flintshire schools distributed across primary and secondary schools. The proposals contained within the Strategic Outline Plan (SOP) for the Band B 21st Century schools investment programme, should they be implemented, will reduce unfilled places in schools to near the national target.

Pupil number projections methodology are aligned with other authorities across the region and are completed twice per year, these are linked to school data returns, namely, January PLASC and September PLASC returns. The capacity assessments are conducted using the Welsh Government's Measuring the Capacity of Schools in Wales methodology and are audited once per year.

The Council has an up-to-date Asset Management system and data from the system is used to influence decision making on capital investment in the school network. Priorities for investment for the schools' capital programme are clear, linked to the School Modernisation Strategy and are funded and based upon up-to-date information.

In 2016/17 suitability surveys were commissioned and conducted across the schools' portfolio based on national guidance. Despite the significant investment through 21st Century Schools programme and the Council's own capital programme, it is estimated that an investment more than £130m is still required to address suitability issues across the schools' network.

Table 14: Suitability of Primary and Secondary School Buildings

Suitability Grade	No of Schools	Percentage %
A	11	14.67%
B	24	32%
C	38	50.67%
D	2	2.66%

School condition surveys are re-assessed in line with national asset management guidance on a five-year cycle, with the repair & maintenance (R&M) backlog estimated in excess of £10.7m, a substantial improvement from the £35m backlog reported in the 2010 SOP.

Table 15: Condition of Primary and Secondary School Buildings

Condition Grade	No of Schools	Percentage %
A	5	6.67%
B	61	81.33%
C	9	12%
D	0	0.00%

Flintshire County Council has no schools in condition 'D' as this would mean that the school building life would have expired or be at risk of imminent failure.

The Council consults with children and young people, parents, school governors and staff and other relevant stakeholders prior to making proposals for any school modernisation change. The consultation process involves the completion and presentation of impact assessments around community, transport, buildings, equalities and language and includes a financial appraisal.

The responses from each formal consultation process are presented to the Council's Cabinet, along with the impact assessment, options appraisal and officer recommendations. Cabinet then decides on how to progress. For all construction projects the Head Teacher or nominated person from the school forms part of the "operational team".

Flintshire consults other admission authorities and coordinates admission arrangements with neighbouring authorities, including common dates of return and common offer dates. Flintshire participates in the regional North Wales Admissions Group to coordinate admissions arrangements and develop/deliver joint training. The Council is represented at the ADEW School Admissions Officers' Group and is aware of national and Welsh Government initiatives in the service.

The composite prospectus, "Guide to Education Services" is reviewed and published annually and is

made available online to all parents on 1st September each year, as part of the annual admissions round. Feedback from Welsh Government on the composite prospectus has been incorporated into the Guide.

Mos parental preferences continue to be met (96%). All appeals are held before the end of the academic year and any appeals outside the timetabled admissions process are head, where practicable, within 30 school days in accordance with the School Appeals Code. Panel members are trained in accordance with the Appeals Code, and advertising, recruitment and training of panel members takes place every 3 years jointly with other admission authorities. This is a cost-effective way of managing recruitment and training and ensures consistency across the region.

Applications for mid-term transfers are made online and every effort is made to process the application to admit pupils within 10 school days. Flintshire's Managed Moves Protocol is currently undergoing another review with Headteachers to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

Music Services for Schools

Music services for Flintshire schools are now delivered by Theatr Clwyd Music which was established in 2020 when Theatr Clwyd adopted the Flintshire Music Service to ensure this discretionary service was protected in the face of significant financial challenges for the Council. Flintshire pupils continue to have access to high quality individual, group and whole class music tuition. Learners have the opportunity to undertake music examinations and progress to county ensembles and national music groups. The Council works in partnership with the Theatr Clwyd Music Trust to maximise the impact of new national funding for music services provided by Welsh Government via the Welsh Local Government Association.

2. Quality of Education Services Areas Summary

Areas for ongoing improvement & sustainability
- Continue to support schools with the implementation of ALNET   - Increase access to education, employment and training for young people in the YJS   - Consolidate the outreach support and training for schools provided by Plas Derwen (PRU)   - Continue to strengthen links between the Portfolio and its secondary schools with the North Wales Economic Ambition Board to maximise learner access to apprenticeships and employment opportunities through the 14-19 strategy   - Continue to improve the school estate through the school modernisation and capital investment strategy   - Implement year 2 of the 5 year action plan from the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan   - Roll out the National Framework for embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional Health and Wellbeing   - Improve provision for children with Autism   - Refresh and embed the strategy for Youth Service provision   - Continue to work collectively across schools and council services to mitigate the impacts of poverty and reduce inequality.   - Share the early identification framework for youth homelessness and NEET through appropriate fora such as the Youth Engagement Progression Framework partnership, to ensure that all partners identify those at risk of poor or non-attendance, exclusion or homelessness in order to provide a coordinated and collective response.

INSPECTION AREA 3: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers

The Council benefits from strong leadership with an effective working relationship between professional officers and elected members, led by the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council. This is demonstrated through the portfolio structure within the Council where Cabinet Lead Members and Chief Officers work closely together to successfully achieve corporate priorities. This is exemplified in key documents such as the Council Plan and Well-Being Plan which are focused on improving outcomes for Flintshire communities and their residents, including children and young people.

Programme Boards are in place for each portfolio and are attended by the Chief Executive, Leader of the Council, designated Cabinet Members, Chief Officer and senior managers. The Education and Youth Programme Board provides a purposeful platform for developing the strategic direction of the portfolio, informs policy development and ensures performance oversight. A robust and transparent scrutiny process ensures that there is continuous challenge of performance and evaluation of impact. Cabinet reports, Overview & Scrutiny reports, performance monitoring reports and risk registers are jointly owned by members and officers.

The leadership structure and hierarchy of accountability within the Council, both from an elected member and an officer perspective, is clearly articulated and understood. Roles and responsibilities are clearly documented and there is a constructive working relationship between officers and members that delivers an appropriate level of challenge to the work of the portfolio to ensure the best outcomes for learners but also ensures that positive impacts and successes are celebrated.

Professional and political leadership is used effectively to manage the Council's core business of providing quality and responsive public services in the face of long-term austerity, the ongoing impacts of the Covid pandemic and challenging budget settlements year on year. This has been clearly demonstrated by the collective problem solving by senior officers and elected members in managing the Council's financial strategy and achieving legally balanced budgets whilst protecting and sustaining services. Financial planning processes are robust with high levels of scrutiny and assurance. Officer and elected members have a track record of working together constructively and with clear purpose on difficult issues. This has been reflected in decisions taken e.g. the management of the school estate and the additional financial support provided for services supporting pupils with Additional Learning Needs and deficit budgets in secondary schools.

The Council's approach to strategic leadership is underpinned by public service values. Within the context of delivery of services to children and young people there is a moral commitment to delivery in an inclusive, nurturing and worthwhile way which enables them to successfully embrace adult life and become responsible, independent, economically active and resilient citizens. This is clearly reflected in the structure and priorities of the Council Plan which reflect the Welsh Government's Ways of Working (Sustainable Development) Principles and the Well-being Goals of the Future Generations (Wales) Act and focus on six core areas:

- Poverty
- Affordable and Accessible Housing
- Green Society and Environment
- Economy
- Personal and Community Wellbeing
- Education and Skills

The Council has a good track record of communicating with residents, service users, its workforce and wider stakeholders through external and internal processes. There is a strong culture of engagement and inclusivity when agreeing priorities. An example of this is the Council's post-Covid recovery plan and Wellbeing Assessment and Action plan and in its work through the Public Service Board. What matters to communities is integral to priority setting and resource allocation. From an educational perspective this can be seen in its engagement work around the budget settlement for schools, in its consultations around school organisational change, in the School Health Research Network surveys and action plans and in other key areas e.g. youth service provision, play and childcare sufficiency.

The Council is proactive in making difficult decisions and where needed, the professional and political leadership intervene effectively to overcome obstacles. Systems leadership and the delegation of resources support the efforts to place the learner first and protect the quality of education and support services. This has been exemplified in the work by all officers and elected members to set legally balanced budgets in the face of significant financial challenge. Despite these financial challenges, delegation rates to schools to protect front line services are above the Welsh average and additional funding to protect schools' budgets are challenged in wherever possible. Over the previous two years, the Council made considerable progress in reducing the number of schools in a deficit position, a recommendation from the inspection of its education services in 2019, by targeting additional financial resources for secondary schools. However, with the current level of financial challenge facing the Council which resulted in a 3% cut to the funding earmarked for schools' delegated budgets for the financial year 2023-24, the impact is being seen in a reduction in the level of school balances and more schools at risk of being in deficit.

Across all education services commissioned by the Council over the value of £25k, social value is considered and included as a key priority. Social value is separately weighted during the procurement process, and supply chain partners are expected to monitor and report against the generation of localised social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being outcomes, in order to evidence value for money and social return on investment. A significant amount of social value is generated through education services including; the creation of local employment and training opportunities, retention of local people in employment, employee upskilling, growth of the local economy through a commitment to local spend, investment in local community needs projects, increased engagement with local schools through investment and volunteer time to assist in the delivery of the Curriculum for Wales, and waste reduction through implementing circular economy solutions to reduce, reuse and recycle waste. Two recent school capital projects at Ysgol Brynford and Ysgol Castell Alun achieved £968k in social value outcomes.

There is strong corporate and political support for Education and Youth Services across the Council. Political and officer leadership of Education is innovative and pragmatic. Education priorities are exemplified in corporate and portfolio level plans and are regularly scrutinised through the quarterly monitoring reports presented to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees. The annual performance report for the period 2022-23 showed 98% of actions on track and just over 80% of performance indicators met. The positive impact of this approach has been that the needs and priorities of pupils have been consistently supported both by officers and elected members.

Elected members effectively undertake their statutory duties and make a worthwhile contribution to the development and progress of statutory plans. They also show real commitment to safeguarding the welfare of vulnerable learners. Reports presented to the Education, Youth and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee are thoroughly reviewed by members and officers are appropriately challenged. Members are also positive in their acknowledgement of the work of officers and the impact of their services on children and young people. There is strong member engagement in the following areas relevant to children and young people:

- The Welsh in Education Forum
- The Corporate Parenting Forum
- The Corporate Safeguarding Panel
- The Schools Standards Quality Board
- The Youth Justice Executive Board
- The Education Consultative Committee
- SACRE
- School Budget Forum
- Regional School Improvement (GwE) Joint Committee

Senior leaders and managers communicate high expectations for securing improvement and challenge schools to good effect through a range of forums. For school improvement these include regular meetings with the head teacher community, working through nominated representatives on the primary and secondary Head Teacher Federations, School Performance Monitoring Group and other specific groups e.g. Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator Forum, County Curriculum Steering Group and Emotional Health and Well-Being Strategy Group, Digital Advisory Group and Welsh in Education Strategic Forum. There is also effective monitoring and challenge for other areas of provision through the Youth Justice Executive Board, Children's Services Forum and the Corporate Safeguarding Panel. The key objectives of the Public Service Board are clearly aligned with the Council's and Portfolio's strategic improvement plans.

The Council and its partners have a clear commitment to learners and to developing a learning culture in the county, from early years to adulthood. They understand the impact of national and regional priorities and how these impacts on decision making locally for services e.g. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, Education in Wales - Our National Mission, Cymraeg 2050 – Welsh Language Strategy and the North Wales Economic Growth Deal.

Whilst a lean team in terms of personnel, senior leaders in the Education Portfolio work in a collegiate way with a range of strategic partners across public services to set high level priorities together for the young people of Flintshire. They are well respected by elected members, external partners, regional colleagues and school leaders. There are effective performance management arrangements which bring about improvements. Managers ensure that objectives for individual officers link well to operational and strategic priorities.

The Council works effectively with GwE (Regional School Improvement Service). Since the inception of the service in 2013, there has been a good track record of engagement with the service to support its development and robust scrutiny of the service in holding it accountable for the scope of its delivery on behalf of Flintshire. GwE officers participate fully in Flintshire business and understand and contribute to the vision, aims and objectives of the Council. This is evidenced by the way in which GwE Business Plans support the Portfolio's Business Plan and the Council Plan. Roles and responsibilities of GwE officers in contributing to the delivery of the service within Flintshire are clearly articulated. This mutually supportive, yet challenging culture fostered between GwE and Flintshire officers, helps the Council maintain its focus on outcomes for learners across all phases. The Chief Officer for Education in Flintshire is currently the Lead Director on the GwE Management Board.

All schools have chosen to access the Human Resources, Employment Services and Occupational Health SLA provision which provides for a range of services to assist them in complying with their 'people related' statutory responsibilities and operational/ business obligations. Customer led solutions

manifest themselves in a wide range of service delivery including model policy and information provision, confidential telephone and face to face support, Heads Federation and cluster group briefings, conference sessions, case conferences and discrete advisory session. The take up rates, activity levels and repeat business support consistent 'buy back' levels and evidence that these services are valued and contribute significantly to school performance. Relationships between school leaders and central service providers are very good and the ethos is to support school leaders in their management functions.

Relationships between senior Council officers and trade union representatives are good and there is a high degree of engagement on key issues through the Education Consultative Committee and other statutory groups e.g. School Budget Forum. There is also a good level of informal interaction between the Portfolio's HR officers and local union representatives in individual school processes e.g. redundancy, absence management etc.

3.2 Self-Evaluation processes and improvement planning

The Council has a well-established process of evaluation, review and challenge. Leaders, managers and elected members have an accurate understanding of the Council's strengths and weaknesses. They routinely make good use of a range of rigorous monitoring activities.

The Education Portfolio undertakes a wide range of self-evaluation activities, first at a service level analysing any available data and first-hand evidence to make accurate evaluations of the quality and impact of individual services. The arrangements also identify clearly the areas for improvement and help ensure that progress against strategic plans are reviewed effectively and timely interventions made. This is then fed up into the Portfolio's overall evaluation of its annual Business Plan and into the Portfolio Annual Self Evaluation Report. This then links to the Council Plan which is regularly reviewed by Chief Officers and senior managers and reported on regularly to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees.

Through its joint working with GwE there are clearly defined plans for primary and secondary schools which are agreed between the Chief Education Officer and Senior Manager for School Improvement and GwE Core Lead Officers. Agreed priorities in the business plans are based firmly on the findings of self-evaluation processes within schools. The plans accurately identify key issues and include bespoke improvement plans to address the specific challenges, drawing on the resources of both GwE and the Council's own services. Plans are regularly updated to reflect the outcomes of whole school reviews and support visits commissioned by the Education Portfolio. Progress towards achieving the agreed outcomes are regularly reviewed by the Senior Manager for School Improvement and the GwE Core Leads. This then feeds into termly Quality Board meetings with the Cabinet Member for Education, Chair of Education, Youth and Culture Scrutiny Committee, the Chief Executive and the Chief Officer for Education and Youth. This ensures that strategic leaders are fully informed on school performance in Flintshire.

The Portfolio works swiftly and effectively with GwE Officers to address 'Schools Causing Concern' and 360° support plans are put in place. Where rapid progress in some schools has been required, Accelerated Improvement Boards (AIB) have been used successfully to oversee progress. When deployed, these Boards meet regularly and include key officers of the Portfolio, GwE and school leaders, including governors. Where required, the Chief Officer has used statutory powers of intervention and established Interim Executive Boards (IEB) to replace traditional governance models. This has been successful in improving the pace of improvement in identified schools. GwE senior officers support the IEB alongside senior LA managers. At the current time there are no schools in Flintshire which have either an Accelerated Improvement Board or an Interim Executive Board.

Where it is available, education officers use data effectively to ensure areas for improvement are identified quickly and addressed robustly through detailed business planning. As a result, the quality of information shared within Flintshire is of a high standard, enabling members to scrutinise and challenge progress effectively. With the Welsh Government decision to remove a range of data sets that were traditionally used for accountability purposes, officers of the Local Authority, Elected Members and GwE Officers continue to enhance ways to effectively monitor performance and measure progress.

Education officers within the Council focus well on joint planning and resourcing as well as building capacity for continuous improvement. The Portfolio has strong links with the community, has good liaison and communication with schools, engages positively with parents and carers and works effectively with other Council portfolios and external agencies enabling officers to deliver joined-up programmes that improve outcomes and wellbeing for learners. Good examples of this include the statutory processes around provision for children with Additional Learning Needs, the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Steering Group, the Adult Learning Partnership with Wrexham County Borough Council and provision through the Youth and Youth Justice Services.

The Portfolio engages well with partners, service users and other stakeholders in its evaluation processes and in planning for improvement. For example, the Youth Services Strategy "Multiplying Impact" featured robust engagement of young people's representatives in its development. Any aspect of school organisational change includes consultation with the children and young people potentially impacted and school leaders are regularly consulted directly or through the Federations on major issues. The Council supports schools to make good use of surveys to improve provision and outcomes e.g. School Health Research Network and Sports Surveys and has engaged learners in evaluative activities in relation to school meal provision. Several young people from across Flintshire secondary schools were instrumental in developing and delivering the first ever 'Celebrating being Me' event alongside the Youth Service and Healthy Schools team in June this year.

The Council uses a corporate database for the recording of complaints, concerns and requests for services. A senior manager within the Portfolio is the link officer for complaints. Parental complaints about schools have to be re-directed back to the individual school to be dealt with via their own complaints' procedures. Complainants are advised of the correct procedure and as necessary, the Portfolio provides support to schools on ensuring its procedures are in line with the national guidance. On-line complaints training is available to all governing bodies. During the period April 2022 to March 2023, there were 6 formal complaints against the Portfolio received via the Council's Complaints process. These were in relation to school admissions, refusal of free school transport; statutory breach to ensure a school has a policy; SEN support and reference to drug use during a Community Justice project. No complaint was upheld. There were no complaints in relation to education services in Flintshire investigated by the Ombudsman in 2022-2023.

The Council is compliant with the requirement regarding partnership agreements with its schools.

3.3 Professional Learning

Relationships between the Education Portfolio and schools are strong and productive. Regular head teacher meetings and the partnership groups in the consultative structure form an effective mechanism for raising issues and agreeing actions to tackle them. Flintshire benefits from well-established learning networks within and across schools, and more widely across the region, enabling schools to develop and share their professional knowledge. Working in clusters and alliances has developed well in Flintshire over the last few years with all schools engaging in this co-operative learning approach. Key areas such as Additional Learning Needs, Digital Learning and Welsh Language have all benefitted

from a cluster training and support model.

Flintshire schools engage effectively with the range of professional development opportunities provided by GwE and the Council for school leaders, teachers and support staff at all levels. Flintshire staff have access to a comprehensive learning continuum provided by GwE which delivers appropriate training at all stages of professional development, from Newly Qualified Teacher to Executive Headteacher. Data shows that the take up of these opportunities from Flintshire schools is very positive. Staff within the Education Portfolio are able to access professional development opportunities within GwE where appropriate e.g. curriculum reform.

The Portfolio facilitates a professional network for deputy heads from across Flintshire primary schools. The network meets half termly and during the last academic year, seventeen primary colleagues from different schools shared good practice on aspects including positive behaviour management, assessment and curriculum planning. The senior Primary Learning Adviser brokers shadowing visits for deputies to other schools and signposts coaching opportunities to those seeking to further develop their leadership roles.

As part of the national Hub programme for digital learning, the Portfolio performs the intelligent client function for Ed Tech across all schools. This work is led by the Hwb Board, jointly chaired by the Chief Officer for Education and Youth and the Chief Officer for Governance. Annual meetings are held with all schools to ensure that they are meeting the requirements of the HWB programme and that sustainability of the IT infrastructure remains a key priority. The Portfolio brokers support for schools to develop provision in line with the digital competence framework and facilitates the sharing of effective practice through termly digital leader meetings. Bespoke professional development is provided for portfolio education colleagues on digital learning and recent technology. Flintshire has allocated funding during this academic year for schools and the English as an Additional Language Service to continue to support pupils who are digitally disadvantaged. This should enable up to 100 learners if required, to have additional resources to learn at home or within school to catch up and extend their learning and skills.

Partnership activities make a strong contribution to widening the range of choices for learners and this has benefits for their standards and wellbeing. The Council takes a leading role in developing joint working practices and promotes trust and good communication between partners. These include effective partnerships between the Council, North Wales Police, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, Youth Justice Board, Coleg Cambria, Wrexham Glyndwr University, Flintshire Local Voluntary Council and other local education authorities.

Partnership working between the Portfolio, further and higher education establishments, employers and secondary schools in developing the work of the 14-19 network is good. They successfully promote co-operation and enable school governors, Coleg Cambria, employers and the Council to plan, monitor and resource an effective 14-19 curriculum that meets the needs of learners.

The school improvement team works collaboratively to support schools in accessing appropriate services and educational activities. During the last academic year, ten schools provided adult community learning sessions and ten schools ran well-being sessions with a variety of mentors, introducing projects such as Foster Bear, working in partnership with social services.

One priority in the portfolio business plan has been to support schools to further improve provision for outdoor learning. Eighteen primary colleagues completed level 2 qualifications and six completed level 3. Thirty-five colleagues attended full day professional development courses on new curriculum projects based in the outdoors at Halkyn mountain and Talacre with a particular focus on Religion,

Values and Ethics (RVE). Following the implementation of the new Agreed Syllabus for RVE for primary schools in September 2022, the portfolio has also established a termly RVE network which has been well attended.

The Welsh Advisory Team in the Portfolio actively encourages school staff at all levels, including head teachers, to engage in the Welsh Government sabbatical training programmes for practitioners who wish to teach through the medium of Welsh or wish to improve their Welsh-language skills. This is a key component of the Council's Welsh in Education Plan which has been approved by Welsh Ministers. Take up across the different sabbatical options are good and Flintshire staff represent a sizeable proportion of each cohort. This is extending the number of employees with improved Welsh language skills, which is contributing to the improving quality of provision for learners in both English and Welsh medium schools. The manager of the Welsh Advisory Team is a key member of the Regional Welsh Language Board. During the COVID-19 pandemic the Welsh Advisory Team rapidly and successfully adapted their professional learning offer from face to face to digital delivery which was very welcomed by schools.

The professional learning offer supports current school leaders across Flintshire but also invests in developing leaders of the future. Subscription rates to the NPQH and Aspiring Heads courses from Flintshire staff are strong. Newly appointed headteachers are supported through development programmes and are also allocated mentors and leadership coaches.

Networking and peer-to-peer work is a positive feature in Flintshire schools. This collaborative work has led to a shared understanding of what constitutes good leadership. Collaborative practice amongst leaders is reinforced through strategic forums, at both headteacher and deputy level. These forums support strong effective communication and nurture a mutual sense of common responsibility for the development of responses and actions to local and national challenges.

The Council promotes professional learning for its core portfolio team through structured learning opportunities, most visible through the Flintshire Academi Infonet, which provides learning and e-learning modules on leadership and management, personal development, specific professional development, equality and diversity, Welsh language, health and safety and ICT. Education Portfolio staff also access training opportunities offered by GwE e.g. the development of the new curriculum.

The Council has a well-established and successful Trainee (Apprentice scheme). The Council recruit local people every year to undertake work-based qualifications. The outcome of the scheme over the last 5 years is very positive.

- **97%** of those who have undertaken an FCC Apprenticeship have had a positive outcome.

  - The percentage of those gaining employment within the Authority after completing the programme **79%**
  - The percentage of those gaining employment externally **12%**
  - The percentage of those moving on to Higher Education or other professional training programmes **6%**

The positive outcomes have remained excellent due to Chief Officer intervention to prioritise apprentices who could not gain employment due to the recruitment freeze during the pandemic. The Council also took the brave decision to recruit apprentices during 2021, no other large employers in the area did this, as pandemic restrictions remained in place within workplaces in Wales.

All staff benefit from the annual appraisal scheme which ensures personal and professional objectives are linked to the annual corporate service and portfolio plans. Centrally employed teaching staff have statutory performance management. The process enables employees and managers to explore individual strengths and identify wider opportunities for these to be utilised effectively. These opportunities support succession planning at a time where central services remain under pressure from financial and recruitment/retention challenges, particularly post-pandemic and also focus strongly on staff wellbeing.

As part of its People Strategy, the Council takes a proactive approach to talent spotting and succession planning. Senior managers regularly identify officers who have potential and signpost them to learning opportunities to develop their skills. Many officers within the Portfolio have accessed professional development e.g. Institute of Leadership & Management qualifications and NVQs through a partnership arrangement with Coleg Cambria. Senior managers are identified for external learning opportunities through Academi Wales and SOLACE (Chief Executives' professional association).

Senior managers network and share good practice through quarterly Flintshire Academi sessions which not only provide key updates but also are the driver for developing cross-cutting policies and strategies e.g. the Council's People Strategy and Carbon Reduction Strategy. Specifically within the Portfolio, there are termly workshops for service managers to share updates, future plans and engage in consultation and professional development opportunities. There is a comprehensive online training programme available for all staff of the Council to access on corporate training priorities e.g. safeguarding, GDPR, leadership and management etc. Networking by senior managers through representation on various groups of the Association of Directors of Education in Wales ensures service planning is informed by current and best practice from across Wales. The Chief Officer for Education in Flintshire was elected to the Chair of ADEW for a two year period from May 2023 and is providing strategic leadership at a national level.

However, in more recent times, and particularly since the pandemic, there have been increasing challenges in recruiting into key posts both in the Education Portfolio and in schools. Educational psychology, youth work, youth justice work and IT systems administration have all experienced difficulties recruiting appropriately qualified staff with adverts having to be go out multiple times and Head teachers are reporting challenges in recruiting skilled classroom support staff as well as key roles such as caretakers. In the secondary sector there are recruitment challenges in key subjects including Welsh, Mathematics and the science subjects. Recruitment in the Welsh medium sector is even more challenging. The recruitment difficulties in relation to school cooks, catering staff and cleaners has also had an adverse impact on the Council's key partner, NEWydd, which has sometimes made their service delivery to schools challenging at times.

3.4 Safeguarding

Safeguarding is a corporate priority set out in the annual Council Plan and the Council has robust arrangements in place across all areas. The Corporate Safeguarding Policy provides a framework for all council services to safeguard and protect children and adults, ensuring that all are fully aware of their responsibilities. This policy applies to Flintshire County Council employees, councillors, volunteers and organisations commissioned to provide services on behalf of the Council. Flintshire County Council is a member of the North Wales Safeguarding Children's Board (NWSCB) and North Wales Safeguarding Adults' Board (NWSAB).

The Corporate Safeguarding Panel is well established and includes representation from all portfolios, including Education and Youth, to ensure that all services integrate safeguarding awareness into the

way they work. This panel receives information regarding the working practices and procedures of every service in the Council, providing assurance that the services are meeting their duties in accordance with the Corporate Safeguarding Policy and Guidelines and reports to Cabinet on an annual basis.

The Chief Officer for Education and Youth ensures that all the statutory requirements in terms of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults receive due consideration and that effective safeguarding arrangements operate within the Education and Youth portfolio at the three levels of responsibility of strategic, support and operational.

In order to further sharpen the focus on safeguarding, the Education Portfolio has established its own Safeguarding Panel, and this is attended by senior managers within Education and with representation from Children's Services. It has clearly defined terms of reference, an action plan and ensures that communication up to, and down from, the Corporate Safeguarding Panel is effective.

The Senior Manager for School Improvement has the lead strategic responsibility for Safeguarding in the Portfolio and is the designated contact for officers and schools. The Learning Adviser for Health, Wellbeing and Safeguarding is the deputy designated contact who provides operational activity support, including attendance at national and regional safeguarding meetings. This officer also co-ordinates training for schools, governors and portfolio staff and provides model policies for schools. There is effective communication between Education and Youth and other portfolios in the Council as well as with external partners. An annual safeguarding report is presented to the joint Health and Social Care/Education, Youth and Culture Scrutiny Committee to provide members with the assurance that safeguarding functions are being appropriately delivered and having a positive impact on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

The Portfolio has appropriate arrangements for the strategic planning for safeguarding within both the core education service and schools, which includes monitoring. The safeguarding model policy for schools is updated regularly in line with revised national guidance (Keeping Learners Safe and the Wales Safeguarding Procedures). A structured training programme is in place which includes Level 3 training for new designated safeguarding persons (DSPs) and refresher training for existing DSPs, Level 2 safeguarding for managers and senior leaders including lead governor for safeguarding. Governor awareness training is also delivered termly. Materials and support are provided to DSPs to deliver regular basic awareness training to all school staff. Safeguarding basic awareness, and updates are also incorporated into local authority headteacher meetings and into planned LA training programmes for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and new and acting headteachers. In addition, key safeguarding themes are addressed on a rolling programme including Prevent and Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual violence (VAWDASV). There are strong relationships with key local partners including North Wales Police, Hafan Cymru and the NSPCC.

During the 22/23 academic year 371 staff accessed Levels 2 and 3 safeguarding training from 23 courses. The number of attendees on training has continued to increase year on year from 262 staff in 20/21 from 15 courses to 299 staff in 21/22 from 17 equivalent courses. When including training from governor awareness courses, digital resilience and harmful sexualised behaviour for 22/23 the total number of staff trained was 423 staff from 29 courses.

The level 2 and 3 courses (including refresher and full course for new safeguarding leads) continue to be delivered online. The number of participants per course is limited to 20 to ensure the quality of the delivery and maximise opportunities for engagement. This year, the training reintroduced the input from colleagues in social services, following a pause during the pandemic, which has been

incredibly valuable to ensure key messages and local context is very much part of our delivery content.

Feedback from headteachers confirm the training and support for schools is welcomed and effective. Evaluation forms are completed at the end of each training delivery and the information is reviewed on an individual basis in addition to any immediate response that can be implemented. Feedback is also included in the annual report to the North Wales Regional Safeguarding Children's Board.

Support materials and model lessons for teachers at secondary level are produced to support schools to raise awareness of National Safeguarding Week each year.

Excellent partnership working with Theatr Clwyd has resulted in a powerful drama workshop for Key Stage 3 pupils on the issue of consent, that has proved highly effective in enhancing pupils' knowledge and skills in keeping themselves safe and encouraged some young people to come forward to request individual support. This year, the Consent Project was delivered in 10 mainstream secondary schools, targeting year 9 learners.

The Portfolio and schools operate safe recruitment procedures and make sure that all appropriate checks are carried out. All schools are routinely reminded of their responsibilities under Section 28 of the Children Act and as outlined in the Welsh Government guidance - Keeping Learners Safe. There is regular monitoring activity through audit procedures. Schools have been provided with a model annual monitoring report for school leaders to use to report to their governing bodies and the LA on safeguarding matters.

The purpose of completing the safeguarding audit tool is to support all schools to review their safeguarding arrangements in line with the Welsh Government guidance **Keeping Learners Safe (2022).** The audit tool is intended to help schools identify strengths and weaknesses in their safeguarding arrangements. As well as checking whether the school has robust safeguarding policies and practices in place, the tool asks headteachers/ designated safeguarding persons to make professional judgements on how effective and comprehensive they are by using the Red/Amber/Green (RAG) rating. Schools have a benchmark against which to work to continually develop and improve.

Flintshire schools were asked to complete the audit tool, in addition to the Safeguarding Children Annual Report in spring term 2022. The annual report is completed by schools for monitoring and includes review of DBS checks, staff training and policies. 74 from 78 schools returned a completed audit tool and all 78 completed the annual report. Data was reviewed and results shared with headteacher federations and individual schools were approached where further clarification or bespoke support was required. The Chief Officer wrote to all headteachers to highlight the common themes that were identified upon review of the audit tool/annual reports. Support has been prioritised accordingly; either on an individual school level or through a broader approach, including training or policy development or updates.

The audit tool will be requested for submission every two years with schools encouraged to update on an ongoing basis. The request for the Safeguarding Children Annual Report is scheduled to continue every 12 months. Submissions received are 27 from 78 at this point in the academic year, which is a decrease from previous years and in the main, as a consequence of the national action short of strike. The annual reports are currently under review and the findings will be shared in the autumn term.

Between April 2022 and June 2023, 15 primary schools, one Pupil Referral Unit and two secondary schools were inspected. All were judged to have safeguarding arrangements that meet requirements and provide no cause for concern. Three primary schools had health and safety issues relating to site security identified and the local authority provided advice and support to those schools in quickly responding to the issues raised.

The strategic lead for safeguarding and the learning adviser work effectively in partnership with managers from social services and the human resources team in the management of allegations against members of staff from schools. Online safety is an area regularly considered by the Education, Youth and Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The Council actively encourages all schools to use the 360° Safe Cymru Tool and the All Wales School Liaison Core Programme. The IT Service Level Agreement provides for web filtering in schools.

3.5 Use of resources

Flintshire's response to funding reductions in recent years has been measured and appropriate. The Council has adopted a systematic approach to ensure that efficiencies are secured across all services and the organisation has embraced alternative models of delivery where appropriate. There are plenty of examples of good practice and innovation within the Council.

Education reform and investment has remained a priority for the Council despite the challenging financial climate. The high strategic priority given to the education service is reflected in the Council's allocation of both revenue and capital resources. The schools' delegated budgets have been generally protected from efficiency reductions in recent years until the difficult decision taken this year to cut 3% from the earmarked uplift for schools, reducing it to 5.1% rather than the 8.1% originally planned. Risks related to the impact of poor funding on the quality of education services have been clearly set out and are understood by elected members and head teachers. The Council reviews the outcomes of its financial plans to make sure that funding is spent wisely and has a positive impact on standards.

The school funding formula is regularly reviewed in consultation with schools and reported to the School Budget Forum. Staffing, accommodation and financial resources are effectively managed and deployed to support learning and improvement. Partnership activity provides good value for money because it contributes to extensive opportunities and improved outcomes for learners in aspects which the Council and its schools alone could not provide.

The Council is committed to an ambitious school modernisation investment programme by maximising Welsh Government's Sustainable Learning Communities funding (previously 21st Century Schools) and its own capital funding. Flintshire is also a Pathfinder Council for the new Mutual Investment Model created by Welsh Government to deliver a new 3-16 learning campus in Mynydd Isa which will be the Council's first net zero carbon school in operation. The Council has also secured funding in recent times through Welsh Government's additional grant funding streams for Small and Rural Schools Infant Class Sizes, Welsh Medium, Childcare, Community Learning and Community Facilities and Additional Learning Needs. The Council has also maximised its investment programme through seeking additional external funding through Sports Wales to support schools to improve their facilities. The Council has a positive reputation for delivering quality projects on time and within budget.

The Council currently has an estimated Repair & Maintenance (R&M) of approximately £10.79m, which is a substantial improvement from the £35m backlog reported in the 2010 Strategic Outline Programme and has been achieved through targeted capital investment. However, the level of R&M remains a risk and is strategically linked to the Band B of the Sustainable Communities for Learning

Programme.

In response to a recommendation in its Estyn inspection of 2019, the Council had made significant progress in reducing the number of schools in deficit. It refreshed its policy for the management and monitoring of schools' deficits which is robustly applied. There are effective working relationships between senior council officers and school leaders to ensure an appropriate level of both challenge and support to control spending and reduce deficits in schools. With the level of inflationary pressures experienced over the last year and the 3% real terms cut to school budgets in this financial year, the number of schools declaring a deficit position is going to increase in the financial year 23-24. This worsening financial position is also reflected in a significant rise in the number of redundancies in teaching and support staff across the school network at the end of this academic year. Where balances are above the recommended levels, schools are required to submit spending plans to clearly demonstrate how resources are being invested appropriately for the benefit of current learners. An annual report on school balances is presented to the Council's Cabinet and Audit & Governance Committee for member scrutiny.

The Portfolio's services are heavily dependent on funding from Welsh Government through the Local Authority Education Grant and the Education Improvement Grant and any reduction/removal of these grants poses a risk. This is carefully monitored through the risk management processes within the portfolio and more widely across the Council. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence that grant funding is maximised to support strategic priorities and deliver quality services and drive positive change. Late notification from external funders for some services e.g. Youth Justice can make strategic planning difficult and create uncertainty within the workforce, impacting on recruitment and retention. In the best examples of targeted funding streams, early bespoke interventions with families make measurable contributions to improved educational outcomes.

There are detailed and rigorous financial management processes across the Council and regular reviews of portfolio budgets to ensure value for money and the identification of efficiencies. Cost pressures and other financial risks e.g. price volatility and inflation, are closely monitored. The Education and Youth Portfolio has delivered £3m of efficiencies through the business planning process over the last eight years. These efficiencies have been achieved whilst ensuring high quality services continue to meet need. Through regular portfolio budget management processes, senior managers take responsibility for their services budgets and are well supported by the corporate finance team. However, the Portfolio's budget has limited capacity for further efficiencies to support the Council's medium term financial strategy and is also facing a greater demand for services than ever before, particularly in relation to Additional Learning Needs and Education other than at School provision.

With a significant proportion of its budget used to commission the regional school improvement service, it is important that the Council is reassured that GwE has effective financial management processes in place. Communication and consultation about financial arrangements are effective with both core funding and grant-expenditure kept under regular review by GwE, the host local authority, the Joint Committee and all Chief Executives across the region. Detailed work has been undertaken to align grant allocations with priorities. Supporting Improvement Advisers to challenge schools on their use of grant funding to improve pupil outcomes remains a priority.

Overall, the Council's education services, including schools, continue to provide good value for money.

3. Leadership & Management Summary

Areas for ongoing improvement & sustainability
- Maintain rigorous budgetary monitoring and management processes to protect the sustainability of Council funding in challenging financial times to protect the delivery of quality education services.   - Maintain the effective monitoring and governance of the education service to drive continuous school improvement and deliver positive outcomes for learners.   - Continue to improve the school estate through the School Modernisation Strategy and the maximisation of Welsh Government funding streams.