

LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 SEPTEMBER 2012

Minutes of the Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Studio 2, Flint Pavillion on Thursday 20 September 2012.

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors I.A. Dunbar, R. Hampson, S. Jones, C. Legg, P. Lightfoot, D.I. Mackie, P. Shotton, C.A. Thomas.

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Mr D. Hytch, Mrs R. Stark, Mrs C. Burgess.

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors R. Guest (for N. Matthews) and V. Gay (for A. Bragg).

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor P. Macfarlane

APOLOGIES: Councillor M. Bateman

CONTRIBUTORS: Cabinet Member for Education, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Leisure, Director of Lifelong Learning, Head of Development and Resources, Head of Culture and Leisure, Head of Inclusion Services, Finance Manager, Lifelong Learning.

IN ATTENDANCE: Learning and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

The Chairman advised Members of the need to declare a personal interest in school related items on the agenda if they were school or college governors. All Members present except Councillors C. Bithell, R.G. Hampson, P. Shotton and I.A. Dunbar and P.R. Lightfoot (who were not school governors) declared an interest as school governors.

The Chairman advised the Committee that he is Deputy Head teacher of a junior school which contains Wrexham's provision for children with a hearing impairment.

18. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 June 2012 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

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

19. COMMUNITY PLAY PROJECT

The Head of Culture and Leisure provided a report to update the Committee about the North East Wales Community Play Project (NEWCPP).

Councillor C.A. Thomas expressed her disappointment that her ward was not eligible for the scheme, as it was not a Communities First area.

Councillor S. Jones asked about assistance for areas which did not meet criteria for this project. The Head of Culture and Leisure said that match funding with town and community councils was the way to address play area improvements, and that such a project was underway in Hope.

The Cabinet Member for Education said that external consultants had looked at the worst play areas in the county and recommended that the Villa, Hope, be improved.

Councillor C.A. Thomas said that the Hope Community Council and Cadwyn Clwyd would be partly funding the Hope project.

Councillor I.A. Dunbar said that whilst he applauded the project, he was concerned that, when the project moved to Connah's Quay, that it did not affect take up of the play scheme already in operation. The Head of Culture and Leisure said that the project would not be detrimental to the current play scheme, in that it was for a fixed term and will be offering different play opportunities.

Councillor D.I. Mackie said that whilst he had been very impressed by the project, he was concerned about the legacy of the project. The Head of Culture and Leisure said that legacy was a big issue and that engagement was needed with local communities and agencies as the Council cannot sustain it. He also stated that advice would be sought from Glyndwr University who are evaluating the project.

Mrs. Rebecca Stark asked about the timeframe for evaluation from Glyndwr University. The Head of Culture and Leisure responded that research is ongoing until the end of the grant period.

Councillor C.A. Thomas asked if sustainability featured in the grant application. The Director for Lifelong Learning reported that Flintshire County Council cannot offer funding to continue the project and that the project should be self sustainable.

The Chairman noted that evaluation was ongoing and asked if the project had failed if there is no legacy. The Director for Lifelong Learning said that the lasting impact of the project will be ascertained after evaluation. The Chair asked that an evaluation of the first project be available for the next meeting.

Councillor P. Shotton said that Councillor Mackie had made a valid point about legacy. He agreed that the project offers fantastic resources and hoped that the Bryn Deva and Golftyn areas of his ward would benefit when the project moved to Connah's Quay. The Chairman asked which areas would be targeted by the project. The Head of Culture and Leisure said that this was to be confirmed.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That an evaluation from the first project be available for the next meeting.

20. QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT ON PROGRESS WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ESTYN ACTION PLAN

The Director of Lifelong Learning introduced a report to consider progress with implementation of the Action Plan following the 2011 Estyn Inspection of Local Authority Education Services for Young People. He reported that a progress report had gone to cabinet. He said that a lot of progress had been made in relation to the actions identified.

Councillor S. Jones commented that the font size of the report was too small and asked if it could be enlarged by 2 point sizes. The Director for Lifelong Learning agreed and said that a larger font would be used and the report offered in A3 format.

The Chairman asked if there had been any impact locally on the GCSE English results. The Director for Lifelong Learning reported that the intervention by the Minister for Education resulted in the re-grading of WJEC English GCSE which had an impact in all Flintshire schools except one which offered AQA English. There was no commitment to regrades at that school thus the only option was resits for affected students.

Councillor C.A. Thomas asked if higher English standards were required and how these would be addressed. The Director for Lifelong Learning said that there was focus across the board in literacy and numeracy and referred to the planned introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework and tests next year in Wales.

Councillor I.A. Dunbar said that he was pleased by the actions of the Minister for Education. He referred to the introduction of the statutory School Governor training by the Welsh Government and said schools did not know when it would start and who would monitor attendance. The Director for Lifelong Learning replied that there was no guidance at present on monitoring training for governors. He clarified that it was mandatory that a council offered training for governors, but not mandatory that governors take up the training.

The Cabinet Member for Education concurred with Councillor I.A. Dunbar and he added that it was the governors' responsibility to improve standards in schools.

Mr D. Hytch reported that Governor Training had been held the previous evening. He went on to seek clarification of point 2.2.5 which referred to "Classroom Management". The Director for Lifelong Learning replied that Flintshire did offer programmes for schools and would go in and offer support for teachers and schools. Support was accessed via a request system.

Mrs R. Stark was concerned about the time spent on behaviour management training. She asked how pupil premiums were being spent, if there was a plan and how rigorous Estyn would be. The Director for Lifelong Learning said that pupil premiums were devolved to schools to be used alongside other resources for pupils from low income backgrounds. He added that some schools targeted the funding well with good strategies, but in other schools it was subsumed into the school budget.

Councillor S. Jones asked if there had been a reduction in staff delivering training to governors and schools. The Director for Lifelong Learning confirmed that there had been no staffing changes.

The Chairman asked why school governor training sessions were being held at the Beaufort Park Hotel rather than council owned facilities. The Director for Lifelong Learning agreed that the Beaufort Park should not be used and that various premises can be used for meetings, such as leisure centres and partner facilities.

Councillor V. Gay suggested that Governor training be delivered locally in a high school, eg. Saltney High to cover all schools in the local area. Councillor I.A. Dunbar agreed that this was a good idea. The Director for Lifelong Learning suggested that clusters of schools could commission their own training and that he would take the suggestions on board.

RESOLVED:

That members consider progress with the implementation of the Estyn Action Plan.

21. FORMULA REVIEW UPDATE/BUDGET STRATEGY

The Director of Lifelong Learning introduced a report to inform the Committee of the work and progress ongoing in relation to the Schools Funding Formula review.

The Finance Manager was introduced to the Committee. She detailed the background to the report, the main features which were:-

- Why the school funding formula needs overhauling as it was outdated, having first been developed in 1996
- That it is a high risk project as there will potentially be “winners” and “losers”.
- A project board and three project sub-groups had been formed. The project groups met over the summer and the next project board would meet in November/December 2012.
- When proposals for revising and amending the formula were complete they would go to project sub groups, the project board then scrutiny committees.

The Committee was asked how it wished to contribute to the process.

Councillor I.A. Dunbar said that some schools would be underfunded. In response, the Finance Manager said that schools might be eligible for more funding, some less and others would see no changes. If there were to be any losers, there would be clear transitional arrangements. The Director of Lifelong Learning said that the formula review would determine how money was allocated and would not offer additional funding. If changes to funding were implemented, the basic level of education would need to be protected.

The Cabinet Member for Education said that there will be an impact on the Flintshire County Council education department and that schools will call on them for budget help and this expectation will continue.

Councillor D.I. Mackie emphasised the need for transitional arrangements and to close the funding gap between schools.

Councillor R. Guest concurred with Councillor D. Mackie and asked if there was member involvement on the project board. The Finance Manager confirmed that the Executive Member for Education was on the board.

Councillor S. Jones reported that Castell Alun had one of the lowest budgets. The Director for Lifelong Learning responded that Castell Alun was a large school in a compact site with low social needs. The Finance Manager added that the project was about equity and ensuring every school got its fair share of funding. The Director of Lifelong Learning emphasised that he did not want the formula to be used to reorganise schools.

Mrs R. Stark said that the formula should take into consideration the extent of in-house financial management expertise in schools. She said staff would need to be trained in budget management. Secondary schools had bursars, but not primary schools. The Finance Manager responded that there was a school business management group for secondary schools and that training would be developed for finance managers.

Councillor. C.A. Thomas asked if variances in heating costs of schools, would be taken into account in the formula. The Head of Finance confirmed that there was consideration for boiler efficiency.

Councillor R. Guest asked about schools which prefer to have certain issues dealt with centrally by Flintshire County Council. The Director for Lifelong Learning responded that if schools do not wish to have a devolved budget, they can hand this back to the local authority, which can work for them by consent.

RESOLVED

That members consider the Schools Funding Formula project brief and note the progress of the Schools Funding Formula.

22. QUARTER 1 SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORTS

The Director introduced a report to request that the Committee consider the 2012/13 Quarter 1 service reports for the period April-June 2012.

Development and Resources

The Head of Development and Resources gave an overview of key messages across work streams in Development and Resources. He reported that the Schools Modernisation Programme was moving to its second consultation for Holywell, Connah's Quay and Queensferry areas. The options formulated last year were:

- A 3-16 facility at Queensferry
- Connah's Quay post 16 hub in conjunction with Deeside College.
- Amalgamation of Holywell infant and junior school into a through primary school
- A new and smaller secondary school at Holywell.

The Head of Development and Resources reported the following developments:

- The new school at Connah's Quay had opened
- Designs had been signed off for a new school at Shotton.
- There was to be an amalgamation of a controlled primary and Church aided school to form a new aided school.
- The publication of statutory proposals for the closure of Rhes y Cae school. There was one month to receive objections. If objections were received, they would be referred to Welsh Ministers.
- The Council was still in discussion with Welsh Government regarding the Schools Programme Grant
- A £32 million pound grant had been approved for Holywell and Connah's Quay and the Council need a commitment to fund the other 32 million.

Councillor C.A. Thomas asked if the modernisation project would use up the Capital Programme funding. The Head of Development and Resources said that the formula for capital funding will be the same and

smaller investments will be unaffected. Councillor Thomas asked about section 106 funding. The Head of Development and Resources said that, 106 monies could not increase the budget of over populated schools as the 106 money has got to go to the same area as the development. Councillor Thomas asked about the Youth Strategy and Staffing/Premises issues. The Head of Development and Resources replied that the council was reducing the numbers of underused premises and were transferring some to community management arrangements and leases where it was considered sustainable. He reported that the Youth Service would be looking at reducing layers of management and increasing numbers of youth workers.

Councillor D.I. Mackie asked how much the council would borrow for schools modernisation. The Director for Lifelong Learning replied that prudential borrowing of £29 million would be undertaken over a 40 year period. The repayments would come from corporate budget. The Head of Resources and Development said that the council was expected to supply 50% of the cost of 21st century schools. He added that the prudential borrowing route would spread the cost like a mortgage.

Schools Services

The Head of the Inclusion Service gave an overview of key messages across work streams in school services as follows:

- Five key priority areas – literacy, numeracy, impact of poverty, collaborative working and use of technology.
- National expectations of pupil achievement each year, pupils performance monitored by teachers
- Welsh Assembly Government had asked for outstanding literacy and numeracy teachers to help improve practice, and that volunteers would be required
- Use of Pupil Attitude of Self and School to be used to bring change in schools
- The Welsh Assembly Government Initiative to see progress with the identification of vulnerable learners
- Schools to work more in consortiums
- Examination of how the model for Foundation stage can be adapted for other stages.
- Use of IT.

Mrs R. Stark commended the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning Project (SEALS). The Head of Inclusion Service said that the Literacy and Numeracy Outstanding teachers will develop Key Stage 2 skills.

Culture and Leisure

The Head of Culture and Leisure gave an overview of key messages across work streams in Culture and Leisure as follows:

- Culture and Leisure Services had received 5 commendations in the Flintshire Excellence Awards
- Redevelopment work at Flint Pavillion was now complete
- Flintshire came 4th in the free activities for young people rankings in February half term 2012
- Visits to leisure centres up 9.92% quarter on quarter
- Spectacular Spirit of Dragons pageant at Flint and the Flintshire Festival of Sport both celebrated the Olympics
- 50th anniversary of the Archive Office in June 2012
- Slight dip in Dragon sport attendance over summer 2012
- Increase in combined fitness class attendance at Deeside, Flint and Buckley
- Increased match funding with town and community councils for play areas
- Fields in Trust nominations for 17 recreation grounds
- Awaiting outcome of Families First grant for summer play schemes and buddy scheme.
- Revenue funding to be discussed at future meetings of this committee.

Councillor S. Jones asked if Hope had been invited to take part in Dragon Sports. The Head of Culture and Leisure said that attendance at Hope had previously been poor and not cost effective and that they were aware Wrexham FC were hosting a soccer camp which they did not want to impact upon.

Councillor V. Gay reported that a community group had experienced difficulties paying for a group visit at a leisure centre as their company cheque was not accepted. The Head of Culture and Leisure agreed to look into the matter.

Councillor C. Thomas asked if the youngest participants in the Flintshire Festival of Youth could perform first in future so that they could avoid becoming tired. She went on to comment that there had been instances of planning officers agreeing play areas and then the Play Unit deciding that there were unsuitable. She commented that planning officers have not been attending meetings to discuss the matter with the Play Unit. The Head of Culture and Leisure agreed to arrange a meeting. Councillor Thomas said she had received a complaint about a customer being kept on the telephone for 30 minutes whilst trying to book a leisure activity. The Head of Culture and Leisure agreed to look into the matter.

Councillor V. Gay reported that the Scout Hut application for Saltney has been re-submitted. Leisure services response has been positive. There had been some objections from the public although town and community council supported the application. The Head of Culture would investigate and to make clear to Planning that Leisure support the application. The Cabinet Member for Education explained that the council could not exert legal control over play areas.

Mrs R. Stark expressed concern that School Buildings and Modernisation would not achieve green/amber status until 2018. She reported that her school had problems with mould growth. The Director of Lifelong Learning arranged to meet with her immediately after the meeting to discuss.

RESOLVED:

That members consider the 2012/13 Quarter 1 performance reports produced by the Heads of Service.

23. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Learning and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the Forward Work Programme of the Committee. She reminded the committee that the next meeting, in October, will take place in County Hall and the December meeting will take place in the Records Office in Hawarden.

Mr D. Hytch asked if the date for the February meeting could be changed, as it currently falls within the half term break. The Learning and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator said that she would investigate.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be approved.

24. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 – TO CONSIDER THE EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That the press and public be excluded as the following item was considered to be exempt by virtue of Paragraph(s) 15 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended.
Publication of the report could prejudice staff relations prior to formal consultation.

25. EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN WITH A SENSORY IMPAIRMENT

The Head of Inclusion Service presented the report which informed members about the development of a regional Sensory Service covering Wrexham, Denbighshire and Flintshire. She highlighted the key elements of the report as follows:

- It was agreed by all three local authorities in 2009 that discussions should commence about creating a sub regional service
- Teachers from the service have already been consulted and feel very positive about the benefits of a sub regional service

- Flintshire would benefit from sub regional working as they would access specialists not available in the county such as a braillist and audiologist
- Officers have drawn up a business plan which has gone to directors
- Next step is to discuss project with finance. The service is not looking for extra funding and there may be some efficiencies.

Councillor D.I. Mackie said that members need to be able to question officers in regional projects. The Director for Lifelong Learning explained that that there would be a service agreement and accountability would be built into this.

Councillor S. Jones said that all partners in a project had to be accountable to scrutiny. She agreed that collaboration was good, but that the interests of Flintshire needed to be paramount. The Director for Lifelong Learning assured the committee that scrutiny was taken seriously and that there was an expectation that regular performance updates would be reported back to scrutiny. He added that full accountability to each authority's scrutiny panel had been built into the business case for the Regional School Improvement Service.

Councillor R. Guest said that there must be scrutiny on a sub regional basis. The Director of Lifelong Learning in response said that there is a clear expectation of accountability of Flintshire officers and the regional school improvement service. The statutory responsibility for school improvement rests with the local authority even though a regional team is carrying out some functions on its behalf. The Learning and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator said that she was awaiting Joint Scrutiny guidance.

The Chairman said that the committee retain the right to scrutinise Flintshire improvement and that members' rights are not infringed.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Inclusion Service continues to keep members updated regarding the development, implementation and impact of the sub-regional Sensory Service.
- (b) That members retain control of decisions about Flintshire.

26. **DURATION OF MEETING**

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.27 pm.

26. **ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

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

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.27 pm)

.....

Chairman