

LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
5 SEPTEMBER 2013

Minutes of the meeting of the Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council, held at County Hall, Mold on Thursday, 5 September 2013.

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors: Amanda Bragg, Ian Dunbar, Ron Hampson, Stella Jones, Dave Mackie, Nancy Matthews, and Paul Shotton

CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Carole Burgess, David Hytch, Rita Price, and Stephanie Williams

SUBSTITUTIONS:

Councillor Carolyn Thomas for David Williams

APOLOGIES:

Councillors Marion Bateman and Colin Legg. Rebecca Stark.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Cabinet Member for Education, Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Waste & Recycling and Leisure, Director of Lifelong Learning, Head of Development and Resources, Head of Culture and Leisure, and Business Performance Officer

IN ATTENDANCE:

Housing and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

24. 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 R.C. Bithell and A. Bragg (who were not school governors) declared an interest as school governors.

25. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11 July 2013 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

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

26. PLAY DEVELOPMENT: SUMMER PLAY SCHEMES

The Head of Culture and Leisure introduced a report concerning the Play Development Summer Play Schemes which had been considered by Cabinet on 16 July 2013. He advised that the report had sought to identify sustainable provision of the summer play scheme from April 2014 and made recommendations about the future allocation of grant funding for the provision of the summer play scheme.

The Head of Culture and Leisure provided background information and advised that the availability of grant funding for summer play schemes in 2014/15 and beyond had not yet been confirmed by Families First. He referred to the consultation which had been undertaken with Town and Community Councils concerning reduced funding for 2013/14 and the allocation of play schemes and said that the need for additional provision in rural and urban areas had been raised.

Councillor N.M. Matthews raised concerns around the funding for future provision of play schemes in Flintshire. The Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Waste & Recycling and Leisure advised that the recommendation to Cabinet was subject to confirmation of the Families First funding.

Councillor C.A. Thomas emphasised the importance of play schemes and commented on the increase in participation in 2013. She referred to the meeting of the Task and Finish Group which was held in April 2013 where it was proposed that following collation of the feedback from the Summer play scheme 2013 a further meeting of the Task and Finish Group would be arranged to consider proposals for the 2014 play scheme. She expressed concern that the proposals in the report may not fully address the level of need in some communities.

Councillor R.C. Bithell suggested that consideration be given to the provision of library based events which could be scheduled to take place before and after the summer play schemes.

Councillor D.I. Mackie proposed that the item be deferred to allow the Task and Finish Group to meet and consider feedback from users of the Summer Play Scheme 2013 and that the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Chairman asked Members to consider deferring the item until the Task and Finish Group had met to consider the feedback from the Summer Play Scheme 2013.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the item be deferred; and
- (b) That the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

27. ADDITIONAL ITEM

The Chairman announced that he had agreed that the Committee should consider an additional item on the grounds of urgency, as provided for under Section 100 4B4 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended). The item was concerning the School Music Service Review.

28. SCHOOL MUSIC SERVICE

The Chairman advised that a report on the review of the School Music Service had been due to be presented at the meeting but had been deferred and as a number of concerns had been raised he felt it was appropriate that the Director of Lifelong Learning be invited to provide a response.

The Director of Lifelong Learning explained that a decision had been taken to defer the report to the Committee meeting to be held on 10 October 2013 to allow for final information to be presented following the late submission of data from some schools.

Mr. D. Hytch raised a number of concerns including the payment of fees, contractual arrangements, provision of lessons, deferment of examinations, discounts for sibling groups, and concessions for second instruments.

The Director of Lifelong Learning acknowledged the concerns and advised that he would provide a written response to the Committee which would address the issues raised in detail. In response to the further questions raised by Members the Director explained that schools were responsible for administering the new operating arrangements for the School Music Service 2013. He emphasised that the Authority recognised the importance of maintaining a School Music Service which was affordable for all.

Councillor C.A. Thomas commented on the need for affordability for all and raised concerns that parents had been asked to pay for tuition fees in a lump sum 12 months in advance. She referred to the need for consideration and asked if schools had informed parents of the flexible payment arrangements available to them. In his response the Director confirmed that Service Managers had asked schools to ensure that parents were informed of the payment options available if requested.

Councillor D.I. Mackie referred to the provision of tuition and raised concerns around the implications for schools if there were insufficient pupils who committed to places.

Mrs. R. Price expressed concerns around the contractual responsibilities and requested that further guidance be provided to schools.

The Chairman thanked the Director for his responses to Members questions.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Director of Lifelong Learning provides a written response to the issues raised by Members concerning a review of the School Music Service; and
- (b) That further guidance be provided to schools around their contractual responsibilities.

29. PLAY PROVISION: CHILDREN'S PLAY AREAS

The Head of Culture and Leisure introduced a report about Play Provision: Children's Play Areas, which had been considered by Cabinet on 16 July 2013. He provided background information and advised that the report sought to identify sustainable provision from April 2014 with reference to the maintenance and upgrading of children's play areas. The report also made recommendations about the criteria which would be applied to ensure investment was targeted where most needed.

Councillor A.I. Dunbar referred to the play areas condition survey which was appended to the report and asked if an updated record was available. Following discussion the Head of Culture and Leisure agreed to circulate a revised survey to the Committee which outlined the latest position. In response to the further question raised by Councillor Dunbar concerning the play scheme at Central Park the Head of Service agreed to provide a written response to him following the meeting.

Councillor D.I. Mackie referred to the investment programme for play areas which was published on the Authority's website and asked that it be updated to reflect the investments made in 2011/12 and 2012/13.

The Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Waste & Recycling and Leisure, advised that due to limited funding available it was imperative that funding be directed at the areas of need identified by the condition survey.

Councillor C.A. Thomas expressed concern that unless Town and Community Councils availed themselves of match funding for play areas designated in need of urgent investment there was a risk that those areas could be decommissioned. She also asked that if any play areas were scheduled to be decommissioned that the Committee and Town and Community Councils be written to and consulted on the proposals. The Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Waste & Recycling and Leisure, acknowledged the concerns raised and advised that the Member for the Ward would be consulted on any proposals to decommission a play area within their Ward.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the following principles be supported:-

- From 2014/15, the County Council align its match funding improvement scheme to the findings of the play survey.
 - That each Town and Community Council be invited to express an interest in participating in the match-funding improvement scheme for 2014/15 and beyond.
 - In order to ensure that the County Council's funding is directed at areas of need identified in the condition survey, Leisure Services will identify those play areas which will be in scope ('Red' and 'Amber' sites) and out of scope ('Green' sites).
 - Approval of any proposed scheme should be:-
 - Dependent upon the level of capital funding made available by the County Council
 - Based upon a maximum contribution of £10,000 per scheme
 - Determined on a priority basis in accordance with the findings of the play survey with investment targeted to strategically important sites
 - Confined to those play areas identified as 'Red' or 'Amber'
 - From 2014/15, 10% of the fixed play match-funding budget will be allocated to meet the ongoing maintenance costs of the fixed play portfolio.
- (b) That Officers provide a further report on the potential decommissioning of play areas recognised as being in a poor state of repair and of low strategic importance; and
- (c) That an updated copy of the play area condition survey be circulated to the Committee.

30. UPDATE ON STATUTORY NOTICES FOR SCHOOL MODERNISATION

The Head of Development and Resources introduced a report to advise on progress since the publication of statutory notices relating to the 21 Century Schools programme. He provided background information and reported that the level of objections had been few. A response to each of the objections had been made to the objector and a copy sent with other supporting information to the Welsh Government (WG) for Ministerial consideration. In the meantime, the design process of the buildings and submission of business cases was progressing to support the receipt of grant funding from the WG. The Head of Service advised that further updates would be provided to the Committee when ministerial decisions had been made.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

31. PERFORMANCE REPORTING

The Performance Team Leader introduced a report to explain the improving corporate approach to performance reporting. She provided background information and gave an overview of the future reporting arrangements. These would include monitoring of Improvement Plan activity with progress to be reported each quarter. In addition, twice annually (quarters 2 and 4) performance highlight reports would be presented from the Heads of Service to ensure capture and monitoring of the 'business as usual'.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

32. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Housing and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the Forward Work Programme of the Committee. She advised that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 10 October 2013 at Hawarden Records Office, Hawarden.

Members reviewed the current programme and agreed that the following items would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee:

- Quarterly performance reporting
- Hill Review local implications
- Apprenticeship and training opportunities
- Formula Review – ideas and principles
- School Music Review
- Leisure Services Task and Finish Group

Members were asked to consider inviting the Chairman of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee to sit on the above Task and Finish Group.

In response to the comments made concerning the Hill Review the Director of Lifelong Learning advised that the deadline for responses to the consultation was 13 September 2013. He agreed to circulate the draft corporate response to the consultation to the Committee to enable members to express their views on the implications for schools and education in general.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be agreed.

33. DURATION OF MEETING

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and ended at 3.50 pm.

34. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There was one member of the press and no members of the public in attendance.

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Chairman