

LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
25 SEPTEMBER 2014

Minutes of the meeting of the Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council, held at County Hall, Mold, on Thursday, 25 September 2014.

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors: Adele Davies-Cooke, Colin Legg, Phil Lightfoot, Dave Mackie, Nancy Matthews, Vicky Perfect, Nigel Steele-Mortimer and Carolyn Thomas.

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: David Hytch, Rebecca Stark and Reverend John Thelwell

SUBSTITUTIONS: Councillors David Cox for Paul Shotton, Paul Cunningham for Mike Lowe, and Peter Curtis for Ian Dunbar

APOLOGIES: Cabinet Member for Education. Councillors Marion Bateman, Ron Hampson, Stella Jones, and Paul Shotton. Mrs Janine Beggan and Rita Price

CONTRIBUTORS: Chief Officer (Education and Youth), School Modernisation Manager, Governor Development Coordinating Manager, and Project Manager

IN ATTENDANCE:

Housing and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

Prior to the start of the meeting the Chairman expressed thanks on behalf of the Committee to Mrs Jane Borthwick, Headteacher, Trelawnyd Primary School, for her hospitality and to the pupils for escorting Members on their tour of the School.

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 Councillor Phil Lightfoot and Reverend John Thelwell (who were not school governors) declared an interest as school governors.

18. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24 July 2014 were submitted.

Matters arising

School transport

Councillor Nancy Matthew raised a concern around the provision and arrangements relating to school transport. She referred to discussions held at a previous meeting of the Committee on the issue of home to school transport and said it had been stated that if there was available space on the school bus then there would be a charge for the child. The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) confirmed that where there is no public service route and there is a space on the school bus, it can be made available to a learner at a charge. The Chief Officer emphasised that no child or young person had been refused transport to school in Flintshire so far this school year. However, some parents had been slow to apply for transport passes this year and Councillors' eligibility policy must be enforced in future weeks and months.

Councillor Matthews proposed that an item on school transport be added to the forward work programme for a future meeting of the Committee. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer and agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the minutes be received, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record; and
- (b) That an update report on school transport be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

19. UPDATE ON SCHOOL MODERNISATION

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report on the progress made with School Modernisation.

The Chief Officer referred to the anticipated reduction in funding from the Welsh Government for 2015/16, and possible additional reductions to specific grants "in year" and between years and reported that all services were committed to finding new ways of working to sustain local public services as far as able.

The Chief Officer commented on the aim to protect the learner's experiences in the classroom. He advised that overall the outcomes being achieved by Flintshire learners compared positively with other Authorities in Wales and continued to improve. He referred to the examples of modernising education in Flintshire in recent years which had proven to deliver improved opportunities and outcomes for children and young people and the further major capital investments in education planned for the future.

The Chief Officer referred to the key considerations in the report and advised that the Council was committed to ensuring that school buildings would meet twenty-first century expectations, were fit for purpose and were a community resource. He introduced Mr. Damian Hughes, School

Modernisation Manager, and advised that 'Band A' schemes of the 21st Century Schools Programme were progressing according to schedule. The Authority now needed to complete its annual commissioning plan for post 16 education and begin considering potential strategic 'Band B' schemes for submission to WG for funding through the next tranche of 21 Century Schools. The Chief Officer reported that there was also a need to commission further review work in relation to schools as some had high percentages of surplus places and some had significant backlogs of repairs and maintenance works.

Mr. David Hytch commented on the current backlog of repairs and maintenance for school buildings and acknowledged that school organisational change would continue to address the issue in part but expressed concern around the significant backlog of work which remained. Councillor Carolyn Thomas expressed concerns on the condition of the school toilets in some schools and asked when the backlog of work to upgrade the toilets in schools would be addressed. In his response the Chief Officer confirmed that the condition of school toilets remained a high priority and referred to the positive progress which had been noted by the Welsh Audit Office concerning the repair and maintenance of school buildings in Flintshire. He also reiterated his comments regarding the pressures on the Authority as a result of reduced funding from the WG and the impact on services and advised that organisational change remained the key tool to addressing such deficits.

During discussion the Chairman reminded Members that an item on school repair and maintenance backlog had been scheduled for consideration at the meeting of the Committee to be held on 4 December 2014

Councillors Nancy Matthews and Nigel Steele-Mortimer commented on the valuable role that schools held within their local communities and the need to retain rural provision where possible.

Mr. David Hytch requested that the Committee be consulted on all proposals prior to their adjudication by Cabinet.

In response to the questions and concerns raised by Councillor Dave Mackie around the future provision of sports facilities at John Summer's High School and surrounding areas, the Chief Officer advised that pupils could use the sports facilities at Deeside Leisure Centre. He also advised that the Chief Officer (Organisational Change) would present plans for the development of leisure facilities across Flintshire at future meetings of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

20. GOVERNANCE IN SCHOOLS

The Governor Development Co-ordinating Manager, Education and Youth, introduced a report to update members on the provision of the mandatory training programme for school governors and to provide a summary overview of the nomination process for Local Authority governors to schools.

The Business Support Manager provided background information and referred to the Governor Development Programme and the Welsh Government regulations which came into force in September 2013 concerning mandatory training for school governors.

Members spoke in support of the Governor Training Programme but expressed a number of concerns around the venues, times, and number of courses offered. They also raised concerns around the requirement to attend mandatory training which they felt could be a deterrent to the recruitment and retention of school governors who provided a voluntary service in addition to other responsibilities and commitments. The Business Support Manager commented on the initiatives which had been introduced in response to reduced funding and the need to maximise resources. She referred to the collaborative work being undertaken with other Authorities to provide training directly or to delegate to accredited persons or organisations, and the proposal to introduce on-line training modules in the future to cover the mandatory training requirement.

The Governor Development Co-ordinating Manager referred to the nomination of Local Authority (LA) governors and advised that the current policy for the nomination of LA governor positions which were due for renewal was vested in the local Member in whose division the relevant school was situated. As a result of a number of long standing requests for nominations which remained outstanding it was proposed that the existing policy be revised. The Committee was asked to consider the proposal that Members who fail within a reasonable period of time to nominate to LA governorships lose their right to nominate and the governing body be asked to nominate to the vacancy.

Members referred to the difficulty experienced by school Governing Bodies in the recruitment of school governors. Mr. David Hytch and Councillor Colin Legg suggested that an advert be placed in the local media to encourage members of the public to come forward and apply for vacancies or form a "reserve pool" of volunteers. The Governor Development Co-ordinating Manager agreed to raise the possibility of advertising vacancies through the media with the Flintshire Governors Association. Mrs. Rebecca Stark suggested that interested persons could contact the Headteacher, Chair or Clerk to discuss the role and responsibilities of a school governor and it was agreed that the wording of the proposal be amended to reflect this.

RESOLVED:

That Members, who fail within a reasonable period of time, to nominate to Local Authority governorships, following appropriate discussion with Members, Clerks and individual Schools, lose their right to nominate and the governing body is asked to nominate to the vacancy.

21. VARIATION IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman indicated that there would be a change in the order of the agenda and the item on the Improvement Plan Monitoring Report would be brought forward.

22. IMPROVEMENT PLAN MONITORING REPORT

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report on the 2014/15 Improvement Plan Monitoring Report relevant to the Committee. The report covered the period April – July 2014.

The Chief Officer advised that the following Improvement Plan sub-priority reports were attached to the report for the Committee's consideration:

- Modernised and High Performance Education
- Apprenticeships and Training

The Chairman invited members to raise questions.

Mr. David Hytch referred to the RAG status for improving skills in literacy and numeracy and queried why it was Green. The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) explained that the issue around creating capacity would not effect the end delivery of the programme and outcomes and that the issue in relation to staffing was temporary.

Mr. Hytch raised a further query concerning ensuring best quality educational support during implementation of the national model for regional working. He referred to the Perception Survey of Schools' views of Council Services which had been undertaken and asked how sufficient evidence could be provided if only 20 schools had responded. The Chief Officer acknowledged the comment and explained that a full update would be provided by GwE later in the year.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That the comments of the Committee be forwarded to the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee, who are responsible for the overview and monitoring of performance.

23. APPRENTICESHIPS, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The Chairman invited Mr. Paul Corner, Project Manager, to provide an update on progress concerning creation of Apprenticeships and Training opportunities. He provided background information and referred to the main achievements for the previous six months concerning the National Youth Engagement and Progression Framework, Information Sharing Protocol, Apprenticeships, engagement with businesses, Communities First Activity and the Deeside Enterprise Zone Shared Apprenticeship Scheme. The Project Manager also gave an overview of the next key steps.

During discussion the Project Manager responded to the questions and concerns raised by members around monitoring of attendance and timekeeping.

Mrs. Rebecca Stark requested that the next progress report included feedback on the scheme from the perspective of apprentices and businesses.

Councillor Peter Curtis asked if information could be included in the next update report on how disabled people were being supported to find work.

Councillor Colin Legg emphasised the value of apprenticeships and expressed the view that the achievement of skills and crafts should be more widely promoted.

Following a suggestion from the Project Manager, the Committee agreed that the next update report (to be submitted to the Committee in March, 2015) focus in-depth on apprenticeships.

Mr. David Hytch congratulated the Project Manager and Officers on the positive outcomes and progress achieved to date.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee commissions a further progress report, with particular emphasis on apprenticeships, in six months' time.

24. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Housing and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the Forward Work Programme of the Committee. The Facilitator informed members that she would be meeting the Chief Officer (Organisational Change) to discuss Leisure Service items for inclusion on the Forward Work Programme.

Members reviewed the current programme and it was agreed that a special meeting be arranged to consider the item on the Post 16 Commissioning Strategy 2015/16. It was also agreed that the item on Federation and Clusters be moved and submitted to the meeting of the Committee to be held on 23 October 2014, and that an item on school

transport be added to the forward work programme for consideration at a future meeting.

The Facilitator advised that the Headteachers of Gwynedd and Sychdyn Primary schools would also be invited to attend the meeting of the Committee on 23 October 2014 to provide feedback on school to school support in relation to the item on Learning from the School Performance Monitoring Group (SPMG).

RESOLVED:

That subject to the above the Forward Work Programme be agreed.

25. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

(The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.15pm)

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Chairman