

LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
4 DECEMBER 2014

Minutes of the meeting of the Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council, held at St. Richard Gwyn Catholic High School, Flint, on Thursday, 4 December 2014.

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors: Marion Bateman, Adele Davies-Cooke, Ian Dunbar, Ron Hampson, Colin Legg, Mike Lowe, Dave Mackie, Nancy Matthews, Vicky Perfect, Paul Shotton, Nigel Steele-Mortimer and Carolyn Thomas.

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Janine Beggan, David Hytch, Rita Price, Rebecca Stark and Rev. John Thelwell

APOLOGIES: Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection and Leisure. Councillors Stella Jones and Phil Lightfoot

CONTRIBUTORS: Cabinet Member for Education, Chief Officer (Education and Youth), Chief Officer (Organisational Change). (For minute no. 35) Pupil Support Services Manager. (For minute no.37) Principal Leisure Services Officer, Play Development Officer, and Families First Lead/Youth Service Manager. (For minute no. 39) Finance Manager, Lifelong Learning

IN ATTENDANCE:

Housing and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

The Chairman expressed thanks on behalf of the Committee to Mr Ron Keating, Headteacher, St. Richard Gwyn Catholic High School, for his hospitality and to the pupils for escorting Members on their tour of the School.

33. 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 declared an interest as school governors.

34. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 October 2014 were submitted.

Accuracy

Councillor Chris Bithell said he had been present at the meeting and asked that the minutes be amended to reflect this.

Councillor Mike Lowe and Reverend John Thelwell said they had submitted their apologies to the meeting.

RESOLVED:

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

35. SCHOOL TRANSPORT UPDATE

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report on the progress made on the implementation of the revised school transport policy. He expressed his appreciation to Mr. Ron Keating, Headteacher, St. Richard Gwyn Catholic High School, and his team for their professionalism and positive approach towards the revised policy and working practices.

The Chief Officer provided background information and advised that the change in the school transport policy had affected new pupils starting at St. Richard Gwyn Catholic High School from September 2014. He referred to the main considerations in the report which outlined the support and information made available to parents and pupils to enable them to be prepared for the revised policy. The Chief Officer emphasised that free transport was being maintained for pupils who were eligible under the previous policy as they progress through the school. He advised that in the future it was the wish of the School to provide a service for all pupils regardless of faith and within the framework of the amended school transport policy.

During discussion Members raised concerns around the issue of parental choice. The Cabinet Member for Education and Chief Officer responded to the questions and comments raised and stated that the Authority had never paid for school transport for pupils who were attending a school that was determined by parental choice. The Cabinet Member referred to the anomaly which had arisen in the past in relation to St. Richard Gwyn Catholic High School.

The Chairman welcomed Mr. Keating and invited him to put forward his views on the revised school transport policy.

Mr. Keating expressed his thanks to the Authority and Chief Officer for preserving free school transport for those pupils who were eligible under the previous policy. He commented that the School was a “resource” not just for Catholics but for anyone who wished to participate in the faith dimension of the School and emphasised that it was the only faith school in Flintshire at secondary level.

Mr. Keating referred to the revised transport policy and explained that as a consequence of the planning, consultation, and passing of the new policy on concessionary funding for non-Catholics there had been a loss of 93 pupils on roll which had impacted significantly on finance, curriculum planning and teaching jobs. He reiterated the concerns he had expressed previously that

the change to the policy would destabilise the School's strong admission and stressed the need to safeguard transport to the School.

Members raised further concerns around the financial savings to be achieved. Members also expressed the view that the school was less inclusive and only accessible to children whose parents could provide private transport where public transport was not available. Members referred to the issue concerning the duplication of bus routes.

Councillor Nancy Matthews asked if consideration had been given to establishing more centralised collection points for children to access school buses as an efficiency saving. The Chief Officer agreed that this could be considered in the future.

Mrs. Janine Beggan asked that primary schools also be included in the consultation process on changes to the school transport policy. The Chief Officer that there were no immediate proposals to change the policy but this would be undertaken if there were any changes to the school transport policy in the future.

The Cabinet Member and Chief Officer responded to the matters raised. The Chief Officer reminded Members that they had been fully briefed on the estimated financial savings which would be achieved through network management and the procurement process.

Mrs. Rita Price commented on the equality impact assessment of the change in legislation and referred to the school transport provision for Welsh Medium education schools. During discussion it was proposed by Mrs. Price that the Equality Impact Assessment be considered by the Committee at a future meeting. The proposal was seconded and when put to the vote was lost. The Chairman suggested that a copy of the equality impact assessment be circulated to the Committee for information.

Members agreed to note the report on the implementation of the school transport policy.

RESOLVED:

That the report on the implementation of the school transport policy be noted.

36. UPDATE ON SCHOOL MODERNISATION STRATEGY

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) provided a verbal update on progress made with the school modernisation strategy. He reported that a full business case had been submitted in relation to Holywell Community Campus and the post-16 Hub in Connah's Quay. This was currently being considered by the Welsh Government (WG) and the outcome would be communicated shortly.

The Chief Officer provided an update on the position regarding John Summers High School. He advised that following information on the Northern Gateway development and admission numbers at the School for Year 7 2014, the project team felt that it could not issue a resilient full business case to the WG. The Leadership Team, School and Governing Body were currently reflecting on that decision and would report back in the New Year.

The Chief Officer advised that statutory notices to commence formal consultation in Saltney would commence in the New Year.

In response to a question from Councillor Ron Hampson concerning the post-16 Hub at Connah's Quay, the Chief Officer advised that Coleg Cambria was placing a high priority on young people from Flintshire being educated in Flintshire. He confirmed that there was currently a transport network provided for youngsters to attend Yale College and emphasised the importance of providing high quality learning provision for youngsters in Flintshire.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas suggested that Councillor Richard Jones be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee to be held in January 2015 when school repairs and maintenance would be considered as part of the School Modernisation Strategy item. This was agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

37. PLAY DEVELOPMENT: SUMMER PLAY SCHEMES

The Chief Officer (Organisational Change) introduced a report on the summer play scheme programme 2014 and on the financial implications for the delivery of Summer playschemes in 2015. He gave background information and invited the Principal Leisure Services Officer to give an overview of the main considerations.

The Principal Leisure Services Officer reported that the availability of grant funding for Summer play schemes 2015/16 and beyond had not been confirmed by Families First, however, planning was based on continuation of the funding to the same level. Subject to confirmation of the Families First funding the Council would need to confirm the future allocation of grant funding for the provision of summer play schemes as detailed in the report. Following confirmation the Council would begin consultation with local Town and Community Councils regarding partnership funding for Summer playschemes 2015.

The Principal Leisure Services Officer advised that early consideration needed to be given to developing an 'exit strategy' for Summer playscheme 2016 if the Council was not awarded the grant from Families First for delivery of the playschemes in 2016/17. The Play Development Team would consult with all local Town and Community Councils, children, young people, and

volunteer organisations regarding Summer playscheme 2016 and the possibility of the loss of the Families First grant. The Play Development Team would explore a number of options as listed in the report to assist local communities to continue to deliver Summer playschemes for 2016 and beyond.

The Principal Leisure Services Officer introduced Janet Roberts, Play Development Officer, and Ann Roberts, Families First Lead/Youth Service Manager, and invited them to give a presentation on Flintshire Summer playschemes. The main points of the presentation were:

- Play in Flintshire
- Flintshire Summer playschemes 2014
- Evaluation – what children say?
- What do parents and carers think?
- Summer playscheme 2015
- Summer playscheme 2016

The Chairman thanked Officers for the detailed and informative presentation and invited members to raise questions.

Councillor Ian Dunbar referred to the risk of loss of the Families First grant and asked if any other funding streams were available. The Chief Officer commented that the Council wished to provide as much provision as possible and said a range of localised funding support would be explored if the Grant was not awarded.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas referred to a grant which had been received from Welsh Government towards play and asked how this had been spent. Mike Welsh said that he would provide a full breakdown to all members of the Committee.

During discussion members referred to the recruitment of volunteers for playschemes. Councillor Carolyn Thomas suggested that Town and Community Council's be contacted to ask if they were aware of any volunteer groups which would be willing to assist in delivering the summer Playschemes. Councillor Thomas asked for further details on the summer Playscheme delivered in Higher Kinnerton through Dragon Sport.

Councillor Marion Bateman referred to the issue of safeguarding and asked if CRB checks were undertaken on volunteers. The Chief Officer confirmed that all volunteers would be CRB checked and explained that details on this would be included in the different delivery models to be presented to the Committee later in the year.

In response to a question from Councillor Nancy Mathews concerning insurance premiums the Chief Officer agreed to circulate a briefing note to the Committee on what elements the Council continued to support and how insurance was currently provided.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas suggested that Officers look at the models used by other Local Authorities for Summer playscheme provision.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the proposed way forward as outlined in the report be noted; and
- (b) That the comments made by members of the Committee be collated and sent to the Chief Officer (Organisational Change)

38. SELF EVALUATION OF EDUCATION SERVICES

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report on the draft 2014 self-evaluation of Local Authority Education Services for Children and Young People. He advised that the prime purpose of self-evaluation was to lead to improvements across services, including the improvement of standards achieved by learners. The process of self-evaluation was continuous as part of the cycle of planning for improvement, undertaking improvement work, and monitoring and evaluating improvement. Self evaluation was based on a range of information about strengths and areas for improvement which was collected throughout the year.

The Chief Officer explained that a draft document on self-evaluation was appended to the report for members' consideration.

Referring to page 28 of the document, Mr. David Hytch expressed concern that not all schools were being represented in County events and said that the opportunity should be offered to all youngsters.

The Chairman asked that information on where Flintshire schools were positioned within the new GwE and Welsh Government school categories be provided to the Committee. The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) said that the information would be made available early in the New Year.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

39. SCHOOL BALANCES

The Finance Manager Lifelong Learning introduced a report on Flintshire school balances for year ending March 2014. She provided background information and advised that the overall position for Flintshire schools was a decrease in net surplus balances from March 2013 to March 2014 and a decrease in overall balances. The balances for each school in Flintshire as at the end of March 2014 were detailed in an appendix to the report.

The Finance Manager advised that there had been a robust challenge of schools with balances over the recommended limits and those schools had submitted spending plans. As a result there were no plans to claw back any balances from schools.

During discussion a number of concerns were raised by members concerning schools which held excess balances and those which had a deficit budget. The Finance Manager explained that school balances needed to be considered in the context of the likely pressures on school budgets in the coming financial years. The Authority had targeted high balances but was mindful of the risk of financial pressures and the resilience of schools which may require some flexibility in the future. She advised that schools now received 3 year budgets which would assist them in their planning strategy. Regarding the concerns raised around the setting of a deficit budget the Finance Manager explained how the issue of a deficit budget would be addressed.

Councillor Marion Bateman suggested that the work carried out by Sychdyn Primary School be used as an example to other primary schools in assisting them to reach a balanced budget.

RESOLVED:

That the action taken and continued decrease in Flintshire schools' balances be endorsed and noted.

40. MID YEAR OFFICER PERFORMANCE REPORTS

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report on the 2014/15 Mid Year Service Performance Reports produced at Chief Officer level for their respective portfolios. The reports cover the period April to September 2014.

The Chief Officer advised that detailed Mid Year Chief Officer Performance Reports were appended to the report for Education and Youth, and Organisational Change. He advised that there were currently no high level risk indicators shown in either performance report.

Mrs. Rebecca Stark thanked the Chief Officers for their detailed and comprehensive reports.

RESOLVED:

That the reports be noted.

41. QUARTER 2 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 July – September 2014.

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) 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 queried the Red, Amber and Green (RAG) risk status for raising standards through effective use of new technologies on page 107 and asked why this was Green as work was in progress with the last school not being provisioned until a forecasted date of March 2015. He also queried the RAG outcome for ensuring best quality educational support during implementation of the national model for Regional working on page 108. He asked why the outcome was Green when only 20 schools had responded.

Referring to page 118, Mr. Hytch commented on the 10% reduction in the repair and maintenance budget for school buildings and drew attention to the outcome identified in the risk trend column which he said conflicted with the information provided on page 76 of the mid-year Chief Officer report.

The Chief Officer responded to the comments and concerns raised and referred to the positive evaluation which had been made by the Welsh Government Programme LIDW team on the progress achieved in Flintshire.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the reports 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.

42. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Housing and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the Forward Work Programme of the Committee. She informed members that it had been agreed that a meeting of the Committee would be held on 26 January 2015 to consider the budget proposals for 2015/16. She also reminded members that a joint meeting of the Community Profile & Partnerships and Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committees would be held on 2 February 2015 to facilitate the attendance of the Principal of Coleg Cambria.

Councillor Nancy Matthews referred to her request to hold a future meeting of the Committee at the Alun High School, Mold. It was agreed that the Facilitator would liaise with the Headteacher, Alun High School, to make

arrangements for the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 26 February 2015 to be held at the Alun High School.

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

- National Model for School Improvement
- School Modernisation Strategy
- Statement of special needs – progress report on performance
- Public Library Standards

Councillor Carolyn Thomas referred to her previous request for an update report on the Music Service and asked that this be brought forward for consideration. It was agreed that this would be considered at the meeting of the Committee scheduled to be held on 26 January 2015 as part of the budget proposals. Councillor Nancy Mathews asked if Officers could explore the arrangements made by neighbouring local authorities to provide a music service and that feedback be provided to the Committee during the meeting to be held in January 2015.

The Committee agreed that the Facilitator would write to all members asking for their suggestions on which areas they would like Mr. David Jones, Principal Coleg Cambria, to cover during his presentation at the joint meeting of the Community Profile & Partnerships and Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committees to be held on 2 February, 2015.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be agreed subject to the above; and
- (b) That the Facilitator makes arrangements for the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 26 February 2015, to be held at the Alun School, Mold.

43. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were two members of the press and no members of the public in attendance.

(The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.35pm)

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Chairman