

LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
15 JANUARY 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council, held at County Hall, Mold, on Thursday, 15 January 2015.

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors: Marion Bateman, 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, Rebecca Stark and Rev. John Thelwell

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Richard Jones

APOLOGY: Councillor Phil Lightfoot

SUBSTITUTIONS: Councillors Andy Dunbobbin (for Ian Dunbar) and Paul Cunningham (for Stella Jones)

CONTRIBUTORS: Cabinet Member for Education, Chief Officer (Education and Youth), Chief Officer (Organisational Change), Head of Inclusion Service, Secondary Schools Officer, Principal Libraries & Arts Officer

IN ATTENDANCE:

Housing and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

44. 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.

45. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 4 December 2014 were submitted.

Matters arising

School transport update

Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer referred to the agreement that a copy of the Equality Impact Assessment would be circulated to the Committee for information and said this had not yet been received. The Housing and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator agreed to pursue this.

Play Development: Summer Play Schemes

Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer asked if the Council had received confirmation of the Families First funding. The Chief Officer (Organisational Change) confirmed that confirmation of the funding had been received and the Authority was in the process of rolling out next year's programme for Summer play schemes 2015.

School Balances

In response to a comment from Mr. David Hytch regarding 3 year budgets, the Chief Officer (Education and Youth) advised that secondary schools would receive indicative budget information 6 weeks ahead. Indicative budget information would also be provided to Primary schools next month.

RESOLVED:

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

46. SCHOOL MODERNISATION STRATEGY

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report on the draft updated 'Strategy for the Modernisation of Flintshire Schools'. He provided background information and invited the Cabinet Member for Education to give an overview of progress with the 21 Century Schools programme and local system developments.

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) advised that it was a core education responsibility of Education Authorities to manage the supply of school places. The level of surplus places in Flintshire, whilst similar to the Welsh Average was above the Welsh Government target of 10% which meant that resources that could be focused on teaching were being used to pay for the upkeep of buildings, leadership and administrative costs which was inefficient. He outlined the key drivers for school modernisation and reorganisation.

The Chief Officer reported on the main considerations as detailed in the report. He referred to the process of engagement, consultation, decision making, and implementation involved in the review and modernisation of school provision to ensure the best possible opportunities for learners to achieve their full potential.

In response to the questions raised by Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer the Chief Officer (Education and Youth) advised that the commencement of building work on the new school in Holywell was imminent. He also explained that work on the John Summers project was currently subject to pause and review and in response to the further comments and concerns raised by Members he agreed to circulate electronically the agreed statement which was being sent to all parents.

In response to the questions and concerns expressed by Members around the current backlog of repairs and maintenance work for school buildings the Chief Officer (Education and Youth) suggested that a report on the review of Service Level Agreements for schools repairs and maintenance being conducted by the Chief Officer (Organisational Change) be presented to the meeting of the Committee to be held on 26 February 2015.

Councillor Richard Jones commented on the backlog of repairs and maintenance in schools and the use of school organisational change as the key tool to address such deficits. He expressed concerns that whilst the potential closure of some school buildings which were no longer viable would alleviate the repairs and maintenance backlog, there would be social implications on the areas concerned as a result.

During discussion the Chief Officer (Education and Youth) responded to the further questions and concerns raised by Members regarding the issue of surplus places, mobile classrooms, S106 Agreements, and usage of school sites. The Chief Officer also advised that the WG had indicated that £500m, was available for the roll out of Band B of the 21st Century Schools programme from 2019, however, funding criteria for 21st Century schools would only be available for modernisation projects and refurbishment or maintenance projects were not eligible for grant via the programme.

Councillor Nancy Matthews asked how much of the £64m allocated for school modernisation in Band A of the 21st Century Schools programme had been spent and what the interest repayments were. The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) agreed to circulate an expenditure profile to the Committee following the meeting. Cllr Matthews also referred to the £500m which the WG had indicated would be available for the roll out of Band B of the 21st Century School programme and asked if the Authority would be expected to match fund this sum. She commented on the availability of prudential borrowing for various schemes and asked if the Authority would be able to consider this option to raise funds if required.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas proposed that the Council pursued prudential borrowing to raise finance to reduce the schools repair and maintenance budget. Councillor Marion Bateman seconded the proposal. Councillor Richard Jones expressed concerns that prudential borrowing had implications for the revenue budget. Following a suggestion from the Facilitator that the Committee receive a report on the use of prudential borrowing to address the backlog of school repairs and maintenance Councillor Thomas withdrew her proposal. During discussion it was agreed that a report on the implications to the Council of borrowing through the Prudential Borrowing Scheme to reduce the school repairs and maintenance budget would be provided to the meeting of the Committee on 26 February 2015. Councillor Thomas also requested that the report included a breakdown of the current repairs and maintenance programme.

Councillor David Mackie commented on the difficulty in comparing changes to updated policy documents and suggested that in future, officers be asked to summarise any changes within policy documents being presented to Members at meetings.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the updated School Modernisation report be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee receive a report on the options for prudential borrowing to assist with the schools repair and maintenance budget at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 26 February, 2015.

47. PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS

The Chief Officer (Organisational Change) provided an update on progress against delivery of Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) and outlined the way forward for working with these standards and the current budgetary context in the future. He provided background information and referred to Flintshire's performance against the WPLS in previous years and the current position.

The Chief Officer explained that in the current budgetary context the old framework for Public Library Standards would become harder to achieve and in view of this the Library Service had commenced work on a local Libraries framework. The framework addressed the findings and recommendations of the Expert Review and also the requirements of the Council to deliver services within available budgets. The Chief Officer reported on the key strands of the framework which were detailed in the report.

Councillor Paul Cunningham commented on the Home Delivery service and emphasised the valuable social connections it provided for house-bound users.

Mr. David Hytch referred to the use of volunteer staff in the Library Service and whilst acknowledging the valuable service they provided expressed concerns that this could have implications for workforce development in the future. He also commented on the need not to undermine the professional qualifications required for a career in the Library Service. In response to the comments made the Chief Officer (Organisational Change) explained the role of volunteers and agreed to provide a report on this subject to a future meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas sought information on the services provided by Library Headquarters, Mold. The Chief Officer gave an overview of the range of information and services available and agreed to submit a report to a future meeting of the Committee on the review of archives and

collections held at Library Headquarters and how they would be dealt with in the future.

Councillor Nancy Matthews commented on the possibility of community managed libraries in the future. The Chief Officer referred to the importance of the public library service and the positive impact on the lives of individuals and communities. He commented on the potential for community library models and advised that the library service had a vital role in lifelong learning, literacy, digital inclusion, health and wellbeing and community cohesion.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress made against Public Library Standards be noted;
and
- (b) That the Committees comments on the future overarching framework for library provision moving forward be noted.

48. STATEMENT OF SPECIAL – PROGRESS REPORT ON PERFORMANCE

The Head of Inclusion Service introduced a report on progress of the Statutory Assessment element within the Inclusion Service. She provided background information and advised that adherence to Statutory Assessment timescales was monitored internally within the Education Improvement and Modernisation Strategy as detailed in the report. The performance data was collected and published nationally against the two outcomes also detailed in the report.

The Head of Service advised that Officers aimed to adhere to the 26 week timeline to support parents, children and young people. She reported that the Authority had maintained 100% success in terms of meeting the 26 week timeline where there were no permissible exceptions. Appeals to Special Education Needs Tribunal for Wales (SENTW) remained low which reflected Officer commitment to work collaboratively with parents and carers to achieve an appropriate outcome for children and young people.

RESOLVED:

That the progress on Statutory Assessment within the Inclusion Service be noted.

49. 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 the next meeting of the Committee on 26 February 2015, would be held at Mold Alun High School, Mold. The Facilitator agreed to write to Members to inform them of the arrangements

made with the School. 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.

Members reviewed the current programme and it was agreed that in line with previous recommendations and suggestions, that the following additional items be added to the Forward Work programme for consideration at the next meeting on 26 February 2015:-

- Options for prudential borrowing
- Review of School Repair and Maintenance Service Level Agreements

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be noted.

50. 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