

LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
11 MAY 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Monday, 11 May 2015

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors: Marion Bateman, Ron Hampson, Phil Lightfoot, Mike Lowe, Dave Mackie, Nancy Matthews, Paul Shotton, and Nigel Steele-Mortimer

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Janine Beggan and Rita Price

APOLOGIES: Councillor Colin Legg, David Hytch and Rev. John Thelwell

SUBSTITUTIONS: Councillors Clive Carver (for Adele Davies-Cooke) David Cox (for Vicky Perfect) and Paul Cunningham (for Ian Dunbar)

CONTRIBUTORS:

Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance, Cabinet Member for Education, Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection and Leisure, Chief Officer (Education and Youth), Chief Officer (Organisational Change), Corporate Communications Officer, Finance Manager – Technical Accountancy, Principal Libraries and Arts Officer, and Community Librarian

IN ATTENDANCE:

Member Engagement Manager and Committee Officer

Prior to the start of the meeting the Member Engagement Manager apologised to all present for any inconvenience which had occurred as a result of the last meeting being suspended. He explained that the issue concerning the rules of procedure around the recording of meetings had been overcome and it had been agreed with the member of public concerned that he could make a recording of this meeting on the understanding that a copy of the recording was made available to the Authority.

Councillor Aaron Shotton, Leader of the Council, commented that the Authority's constitution required updating to meet the requirements of the general public and suggested that the matter be given consideration by the Constitution Committee following the Annual General Meeting of the County Council on 12 May 2015.

60. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

61. MEDIUM TERM PLAN FOR LIBRARIES – PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP NEW HUB LIBRARY AT DEESIDE LEISURE CENTRE AND RE-LOCATE HAWARDEN, MANCOT AND QUEENSFERRY LIBRARIES

The Chief Officer (Organisational Change) introduced a report to provide an outline of the proposal and feedback the results of the consultation exercise.

Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Education, read out a statement which outlined the objectives of the proposal and gave an assurance that the Authority remained committed to providing a sustainable improved library service for the areas concerned.

The Chief Officer (Organisational Change) provided background information and referred to the key considerations in the report. He said it was recognised that libraries were community facilities and made reference to the consultation exercise which had taken place during March and April 2015 with community representatives, library users, young people and the equality assurance group to seek views and opinions on the proposals.

The Chair invited members to raise questions.

Councillor Nancy Matthews expressed a number of concerns around the Deeside Leisure Centre location: the proposal was to move the library to the Queensferry area which currently had the lowest footfall of the three libraries. She commented on the convenient location of other libraries situated in town centres and suggested that the existing library facility at Connah's Quay could be a more suitable location for the hub provision. Councillor Matthews also commented on the needs of library users and cited as examples use of the library by young people to do homework and research after school, and use by the general public for I.T facilities. Councillor Matthews also referred to the library mobile service and asked if details on the use of the service could be provided.

Councillor Nigel Steele Mortimer expressed concerns that feedback from the public consultation exercise would not be taken on board by the Authority. He also felt that the provision of a new library service at Deeside Leisure Centre was too close to the existing library facility at Connah's Quay. He reiterated the comments expressed by Councillor Matthews that Deeside Leisure Centre attracted visitors from across all of North Wales and beyond and that the majority of people would not necessarily be users of the Flintshire library service.

The Chief Officer (Organisational Change) responded to the comments and queries raised. He gave an assurance that robust consultation had been undertaken with a wide range of groups in addition to library users and that the outcome of the exercise was critical in helping to form the proposals around future service provision and asset transfer. He referred to the Welsh Public Library Standards which required that a static library service point should be within 2.5 miles of at least 75% of the population and explained that

the proposal fell within the Standard for access by Hawarden, Mancot and Queensferry communities.

Councillor Aaron Shotton, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance, commented on the difficult choices to be made under current and future financial restraints and referred to a 30% reduction in the library budget and the £0.050m savings in operational costs which could be achieved by the proposals and would contribute to the overall £0.600m anticipated savings in library services over three years.

Councillor Aaron Shotton also commented on the need to be mindful of service provision in the Sealand and Garden City areas which had been previously been subjected to library closures and were now served by the Queensferry library.

Councillor Dave Mackie expressed a number of concerns around the proposal to develop the hub library service at Deeside Leisure Centre which he felt was not the most suitable location. He referred to the geographical research he had undertaken in relation to the 2.5m radius and catchment areas and expressed the view that Hawarden, which had the largest population in the County, could be considered as a suitable location. In explaining his objections to the proposals he also referred to the site of the existing library in Hawarden and to a further building which was currently vacant and could be utilised to provide a community library service.

The Chief Officer (Organisational Change) responded to the comments and questions raised and gave an assurance that further work would be undertaken with communities around asset transfer options. Following on from Councillor Mackie's concerns around the geographical location of the new hub library he said a comparison would be undertaken in relation to whether a library was located in Deeside as opposed to Hawarden and Mancot. Broughton would also be factored in as a library coverage with its catchment as this would also have an impact on coverage of parts of Hawarden, and coverage of areas such as Garden City and Sealand.

In response to the queries raised around the CyMAL grant the Chief Officer gave a brief overview of the application process and explained that it had been submitted to the Committee when it had been established what was feasible.

Councillor Clive Carver referred to the current location of the Hawarden Library which shared the same building as the Flintshire Records Office and sought clarification around the future of the Records Office if Hawarden Library was closed. Councillor Aaron Shotton advised that the two were not related. Councillor Carver stated that although he was against the overall relocation of Hawarden Library, he would not be opposed to the provision of a mobile library service in Hawarden, however, but it would be difficult to find a suitable site from where the service could be provided. The Chief Officer reiterated his advice that the Authority would work with all three communities

to consider a range of options to achieve the best possible outcome in terms of location and service provision.

Councillor Paul Shotton spoke in support of the proposal and said the opportunity to secure a grant from CyMAL towards the cost of the new hub library was to be welcomed. He said the location of the new library at the Leisure Centre would also provide visitors with the additional facility of being able to access a wide range of library services.

In summary the Chief Officer (Organisational Change) commented on the next stage of the process which would include working with communities to implement whatever proposal was finally agreed. This would also involve the consideration of design issues, asset transfer locations, and provision of I.T facilities.

The Chair concluded consideration of the item by observing that this issue had prompted a good debate. The comments which had been made and the questions which had been asked were examples of effective scrutiny, and he thanked everyone for their contributions. In the circumstances, the best proposal from the meeting would be to say that the comments the Committee have made during the meeting be commended to the Cabinet as their formal observation on the proposals for the Libraries.

RESOLVED:

That the comments the Committee have made during the meeting be commended to the Cabinet as their formal observation on the proposals for the development of the new hub library at Deeside Leisure Centre.

62. REGIONAL SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPROVEMENT SERVICE (GwE)

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report on progress with the development of the regional school effectiveness and improvement service (GwE). He provided background information and referred to two further national reports on the progress of the four Regional School Improvement Services which would be provided to the Committee for information as soon as made available.

The Chief Officer advised that appended to the report was the self evaluation document produced by GwE for the Thematic Inspection of Regional School Improvement Services in 2014-15 and the specific visit made by an Estyn team to North Wales in January 2015.

Councillor Marion Bateman paid tribute to the GwE service for the support work it had provided at a local school. She also expressed her thanks to Officers, the Headteacher, and staff of the school concerned for their hard work and success in achieving a significant improvement in standards.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report and the self evaluation document from GwE be received; and
- (b) That the Estyn Thematic report on Regional School Improvement Services in Wales be received at an early opportunity following its publication.

63. UNSUPPORTED (PRUDENTIAL) BORROWING

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report to provide an update on unsupported (Prudential) borrowing.

During discussion the Chief Officer referred to the need to build prudential borrowing into the School's Capital Programme and for transparency around how programmes were prioritised.

In response to a query raised by Councillor Carolyn Thomas concerning prudential borrowing and repair and maintenance of school buildings, the Chief Officer (Education and Youth) advised that the issue of repair and maintenance of schools would be addressed as part of the Authority's revenue repairs and maintenance programme. He also referred to the 21st Century Schools programme which would address major refurbishment and replacement of school buildings and reported that the next tranche would become available in 2019.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

64. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Member Engagement Manager introduced the forward work programme of the Committee. He commented on the Annual Meeting of the County Council to be held on 12 May 2015 and the recommended terms of reference to be provided for the new Overview & Scrutiny Committee structure. He advised that following adoption of the new structure the education items on the Forward Work Programme would go forward to the Education and Youth Committee and the items which were to be scheduled onto the Programme would be submitted to the new Organisational Change Committee.

The Member Engagement Manager reminded members that the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 4 June 2015 would be a joint meeting with the Social & Health Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Member Engagement Manager suggested that the Housing & Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair and

Officers be authorised to vary the Committee’s work programme between meetings.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be agreed as submitted; and
- (b) That the Member Engagement Manager, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings.

65. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There was one member of the press and three members of the public in attendance

(The meeting started at 2.00pm and ended at 4.43pm)

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Chairman