

EDUCATION & YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
30 JULY 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Thursday, 30 July 2015

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors: Marion Bateman, Paul Cunningham, Peter Curtis, Adele Davies-Cooke, Andy Dunbobbin, David Healey, Nancy Matthews, Vicky Perfect, Nigel Steele-Mortimer, and Carolyn Thomas

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Rita Price and Rev. John Thelwell

APOLOGIES: Councillors Colin Legg and Phil Lightfoot. Janine Beggan, David Hytch and Rebecca Stark

SUBSTITUTION: Councillor Dennis Hutchinson (for Dave Mackie)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Bernie Attridge, Christine Jones and David Wisinger

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Aaron Shotton, Leader of the Council, Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Education, Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Education and Youth), Secondary School Phase Officer, and Finance Manager

IN ATTENDANCE:

Member Engagement Manager, Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator, and Committee Officer

Prior to the start of the meeting the Member Engagement Manager informed members that the Committee would be considering two school modernisation reports made under the School Standards and Organisation Act 2013. The first related to statutory proposals for John Summers High School and the second to St. David's High School, Saltney.

For the first report, the Committee was being informed of the responses from the statutory consultation period on the sustainability of John Summers High School and the options for future education provision and invited to comment in advance of the Cabinet being requested to conclude on a formal proposal at its meeting on Thursday, 6 August 2015.

For the second report, the Committee was being informed of responses from the statutory consultation period for the proposal to change the age range at St. David's High School, Saltney. Again, it would be for the Cabinet to make the actual decision on the item.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor David Wisinger declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the following item as he was a school governor at John Summers High School.

Agenda item 4 – School Modernisation – School Standards and Organisation Act 2013 – John Summers High School – Statutory Proposals .

The Member Engagement Manager explained that Councillor Wisinger, local Member for the Ward, had been granted the right to speak at the start of the meeting and then withdraw.

The Chairman invited members of the Committee to make a declaration if they were school governors and a number of members so indicated.

16. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15 June 2015 had been circulated to Members with the agenda.

RESOLVED:

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

17. SCHOOL MODERNISATION – SCHOOL STANDARDS AND ORGANISATION ACT 2013 – JOHN SUMMERS HIGH SCHOOL – STATUTORY PROPOSALS

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report to inform the Committee of the responses from the statutory consultation period on the sustainability of John Summers High School, and options for future education provision. He advised that comments from the Committee were invited in advance of the Cabinet being requested to conclude on a formal proposal.

The Chief Officer provided background information and referred to the key considerations as detailed in the report concerning the sustainability of John Summers High School, and transitional issues. He explained that whilst the concerns and anxieties of the local community were recognised, the Authority had a duty to provide high quality secondary education which was sustainable and affordable for pupils in the future. He advised that due to the low annual intake of pupils in year seven and financial pressures, John Summers High School was not sustainable and would not be able to meet the breadth of curriculum required by the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure going forward.

The Chief Officer commented on historical pupil data and the long term trend of low numbers at post 16 at John Summers which had led to the work around transformation. He explained that there was a downward trend of pupils in neighbouring primary schools transferring into the School and that the average transfer rate over the past two years was only 60% from the closest schools. He reported on the projections for housing yield for the Northern Gateway project which was to be developed between 2017-2028 and advised that the total 'yield' of secondary school age child numbers eligible for admission to John Summers was 199. If the full cohort of children were assumed to be admitted the number of pupils on roll at John Summers would be in the region of 504 when all projections were combined, which was below the four form entry of 600 places required at 11-16 age range. The housing yield figures did not take into account parental choice or pupil movement. The Chief Officer also commented on the prediction for future admission numbers based on birth rates in Flintshire and the Shotton/Queensferry areas in particular.

The Chief Officer went on to report on the implications around funding, sustainability, and staffing. He referred to a reduction in funding for schools of around 2% due to nationally agreed pay awards and employers pension contribution increases. He advised that in 2016/17, these costs/pressures would increase again with the national implementation of the Single Tier Pension being a major factor. To provide John Summers with a budget which enabled the school to meet its curriculum requirements, a considerable subsidy would be required and he cited an example which demonstrated the differential per pupil funding between John Summers and another high school in the County. The Chief Officer stated that the Council would not be able to continue to subsidise John Summers High School without adversely impacting on other schools which were comparatively low funded. The School would also need to address further challenges due to falling pupil numbers and changes in specific grant funding. Based on pupil number projections and the assessed impact of real term inflationary pressures the Chief Officer advised that the School could face a 16% reduction in funding over the next four years which would result in a loss of teaching posts.

The Chief Officer referred to the concerns raised by the local community following consultation on John Summers and said the importance of all the issues raised were fully recognised and were being addressed as part of the transitional plans. Full consultation and cooperation was taking place with all Headteachers in the area to secure the best outcomes for pupils and students. He explained that there were currently sufficient places in other schools for pupils who would be transferred if a decision was taken to close John Summers. The options for transport being provided, and subsidised where needed, were being worked through. Students in all year groups would be supported and guided through their future education options and choices and the current GCSE study groups would be given support to complete their current examination choices.

In summarising his comments the Chief Officer reiterated his advice that current and future pupil numbers for John Summers High School were

insufficient to be sustained. He referred to the ongoing reduction of funding in public finance and said the only way to safeguard quality of education for young people in the area was to make a change in the existing provision.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Officer for his presentation. He invited Councillor David Wisinger, the local Member for the Ward, to speak.

Councillor Wisinger thanked the Committee for the opportunity to speak at the meeting and said he wished the Committee to consider the following suggestion for recommendation to the meeting of Cabinet on 6 August 2015. "That Flintshire County Council Planning Officers work closely with the two developers of the Northern Gateway site, to come to an arrangement where a sum of money can be agreed and ring fenced to build a new secondary school. This can either be built on the Airfields site or on the current John Summers School site in Queensferry. If a new technology centre is to be built, as proposed, on the Northern Gateway, then perhaps the school could be linked to this. This new school would serve all the surrounding communities and also stop the migration of children over the English border".

Councillor Wisinger read out statements which detailed the comments and concerns to the proposal which he had received from local residents around transport, transitional arrangements, and pupil numbers.

At this point Councillor Wisinger withdrew from participation in the meeting.

Councillor David Healey raised concerns around the transitional arrangements and asked if there was sufficient partnership to ensure the smooth transition of Year 9, 10 and 11 pupils. He also expressed concerns around the concept of curriculum alignment and said he was sceptical about the level to which this could be achieved and asked if any funds had been set aside to address this matter. In his response the Chief Officer advised that local headteachers were at the very centre of transitional planning and worked in close partnership and in the best interest of all pupils, to plan for any change that might arise as a result of the proposals. The Chief Officer invited the Secondary Phase Officer to report in further detail on the longstanding collaborative working arrangements between secondary schools in the County. The Secondary School Phase Officer advised that collaborative working between schools had provided opportunities for learning which would otherwise not have been viable. He also commented on the subject of school transport and travel arrangements and the use of grant funding which was and would continue to be a pressure going forward.

The Chief Officer also addressed the concerns which had been raised by Councillor Wisinger regarding a financial contribution from developers of the Northern Gateway. He referred to the legal framework concerning developer contributions and explained that developers did not make contributions where there was sufficient school places for children in the area and advised that there was an excess of school places in the area going

forward. The Chief Officer also responded to the additional concerns which had been raised by Councillor Wisinger on behalf of residents around the financial cost of providing new school uniforms and advised that pupils may be entitled to a grant towards the cost of their school uniform and that parents/carers could claim a school uniform grant if their child was eligible for free school meals and lived in Flintshire.

The Chief Executive referred to the historical pupil data which was contained in the report which provided evidence of the steady decline in pupil numbers since 2006.

On the subject of transport the Chief Officer suggested that the Committee may wish Cabinet to further consider a request from young people around the provision of transport arrangements on a discretionary basis for pupils in order to ease the transfer process from one school to another.

Councillor Nancy Matthews said she had concerns as to why, despite historical data detailing low numbers at John Summers High School, the Authority had considered building a new school for the 3-16 age range a relatively short time ago and had subsequently withdrawn from that. She emphasised the need for care regarding the impact of the transition process on young people. She expressed further concerns that the talent of young people nurtured in the Additional Learning Needs department may be lost, and on the redeployment of teaching staff, particularly Post 16 teachers.

Councillor Aaron Shotton, Leader of the Council, acknowledged the comments made by Councillor Matthews and said that the decision to be made by Cabinet regarding the future of John Summers High School was one of the most difficult to be considered. Concerning the proposal for a new build he said that an opportunity had been provided to submit a capital business case to the Welsh Government (WG) for funding through the 21st Century Schools programme. The vision was to give hope and confidence to the local community for the future of John Summers High School through the prospect of a 3-16 educational model and new campus. The business case had to meet a number of tests to proceed. Since then the development opportunities at the Northern Gateway project had not progressed as anticipated and the Authority had been faced with unprecedented levels of financial austerity.

Councillor Chris Bithell reiterated the comments expressed by Councillor Shotton and said that the intention had been to give the School and the community the best chance, however, the anticipated uptake in pupil numbers had not materialised and the latest projections fell far short of the number required for a viable sustainable school.

The Chief Executive commented that there had been a genuine commitment and belief that a new build option and a 3-16 educational model was viable, however, in preparation of the case to the WG for funding for capital investment there proved to be not a sufficient credible business case to put forward.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas proposed that the Committee should request that Flintshire County Council's Planning department negotiates with developers of the Northern Gateway site, the inclusion of a new high school as part of the infrastructure and provision needed for the allocation of houses if a trigger point is reached, perhaps linking with the new Technology facility. Councillor Dennis Hutchinson seconded the proposal and when put to the vote this was agreed by the Committee.

The Chairman referred to the comments made by the Committee on the issues which had been raised during the public consultation which were: pupil transfer and transition, transport, redeployment of teaching staff and teaching and support expertise, and support for new uniform provision, and said that these would be fed back to Cabinet for consideration at the meeting to be held on 6 August 2015.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee requests that Flintshire County Council's Planning department negotiates with developers of the Northern Gateway site, the inclusion of a new high school as part of the infrastructure and provision needed for the allocation of houses if a trigger point is reached, perhaps linking with the new Technology facility; and
- (b) That the issues which had been raised during the meeting on pupil transfer and transition, transport, redeployment of teaching staff and teaching and support expertise, and support for new uniform provision, be fed back to Cabinet as part of their consideration of the report on 6 August 2015

18. SCHOOL MODERNISATION – SCHOOL STANDARDS AND ORGANISATION ACT 2013 – SALTNEY ST. DAVID’S POST 16 STATUTORY PROPOSALS

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report to inform of the responses from the statutory consultation period for the proposal to change the age range at St. David’s High School, Saltney. He provided background information and referred to the key considerations in the report.

The Chief Officer advised that following the recent judicial review of a contested school reorganisation decision in South Wales, Flintshire had re-run the consultation exercise for post 16 arrangements at St. David’s, Saltney. The Council had again received only two responses to the proposal to change the age range from 11-18 to 11-16 at St. David’s High School. He explained that as part of the transition to a new post 16 centre, governors and schools would be ensuring continuity of education for post 16 education students. As such they would be continuing to implement organisational change plans given that transition was planned for September 2016. It was not possible for St. David’s to offer post 16 Education independently and meet the requirements of the Learning Measure.

The Chairman took the opportunity to thank Kevin Grandfield, Secondary Phase Officer, for his hard work and valuable contribution over the years. The Committee expressed their best wishes to him for a happy retirement.

RESOLVED:

That the responses on the proposal to secure improved learner choice and outcomes be endorsed.

19. EDUCATION ICT REVIEW

The Chief Officer (Governance) introduced a report to inform the Committee of the results of consultation with schools on reconfiguring the Education ICT Service which were approved by Cabinet on 16 June 2015.

The Chief Officer provided background information and referred to the key considerations. He advised that the proposed model worked on the principle that schools should be given as much autonomy as possible and that the County Council should retain control of only those services which were absolutely necessary. The model requires several Service Level Agreements to be drawn up by the Council and by schools. The Chief Officer reported that the proposals were agreed at Cabinet on 16 June 2015 with discretion to amend the proposals to reflect any comments that the Committee might subsequently make. A commencement date for the new service has not been determined and in the meantime the service will continue on its current lines.

In response to a question from Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer the Chief Officer advised that the proposed model covered all schools within the County and they would receive the same level of service.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas sought further information around the engagement of a consultant on the reconfiguration of the Service. The Chief Officer advised that a consultant had been employed on a short term contract initially to review customer needs and make proposals to meet the objectives. The consultant had been engaged again on a fixed term contract which would come to an end when the new service went live.

RESOLVED:

That the proposals be agreed.

20. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 – TO CONSIDER THE EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That the press and public be excluded for the remainder of the meeting for the following item by virtue of exempt information under paragraph(s) 15 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

21. SENIOR MANAGEMENT RESTRUCTURE

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report on a new management structure in Education and Youth delivering reductions in costs, providing opportunities for career development and meeting organisational design objectives. He provided background information and referred to the main considerations as detailed in the report. He reported on the proposed new structure which was outlined in appendix 3 to the report and advised that voluntary solutions had been provided in terms of changes to the existing structure.

Mrs. Rita Price raised concerns that there was no reference to educational partners or other providers of education in the new structure and that there was a danger in treating all schools the same. The Chief Officer responded to the concerns raised and gave an assurance that partnership working was recognised as important and would be fully reflected in strategic planning.

In response to the concerns raised by Councillor Carolyn Thomas the Chief Officer advised that the Council had a very positive working relationship with headteachers of schools both individually and collectively. With a fewer and smaller cohort of senior managers there would be more peer to peer support.

RESOLVED:

That the revised structure be recommended to Cabinet at its meeting on the 6 August 2015.

22. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were four members of the public and one member of the press in attendance

(The meeting started at 2.00pm and ended at 3.40pm)

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Chairman