

EDUCATION AND YOUTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
24 AUGUST 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Youth Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Monday, 24 August 2015

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors: Marion Bateman, Paul Cunningham, Peter Curtis, Adele Davies-Cooke, Andy Dunbobbin, David Healey, Ray Hughes, Colin Legg, Vicky Perfect and Nigel Steele-Mortimer

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: David Hytch and Rev. John Thelwell

APOLOGIES: Councillors Phil Lightfoot, and Nancy Matthews. Janine Beggan and Rebecca Stark. Chief Officer (Education and Youth)

SUBSTITUTION: Councillor Mike Peers (for David Mackie)

ALSO PRESENT: (Initiators of the Call-In who were not Members of the Committee): Councillors: Glyn Banks, Cindy Hinds, and David Wisinger

Councillors: Bernie Attridge, Helen Brown and Clive Carver

CONTRIBUTORS:

Councillor Aaron Shotton, Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Education, Chief Executive . Secondary Schools Officer, 21st Century Schools Co-ordinator

IN ATTENDANCE:

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

23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor David Wisinger declared a personal and prejudicial interest for the following item as he was a school governor at John Summers High School. Councillor Glyn Banks declared a personal and prejudicial interest for the following item as he was a school governor at Ysgol Mornant. Councillor Cindy Hinds declared a personal and prejudicial interest for the following item as she was a school governor at Ysgol Penyffordd.

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

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

24. CONSIDERATION OF A MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE PURSUANT TO THE CALL IN ARRANGEMENTS

The Member Engagement Manager explained the procedure for the Call-in of a Cabinet decision.

25. SCHOOL MODERNISATION – SCHOOL STANDARDS AND ORGANISATION ACT 2013 – JOHN SUMMERS HIGH SCHOOL

The Member Engagement Manager referred to the Call-in to the decision of the Cabinet from its meeting held on 6 August 2015 relating to School Modernisation – School Standards and Organisation Act 2013 – John Summers High School. The Call-In notice had been signed by five Members of the Council. To assist Members, the following documents had been circulated with the agenda:-

- (a) A copy of the procedure for dealing with a called-in item.
- (b) A copy of the report considered by Cabinet on 6 August 2015
- (c) A copy of the Cabinet Record of Decision No. 3215
- (d) A copy of the Call-in notice signed by Councillors David Wisinger, Cindy Hinds, Glyn Banks, David Healey and Ron Hampson.

The Member Engagement Manager explained the procedure for a Call-in meeting. He then read out the reasons for the Call-in which was that the Committee, at its recent meeting, had recognised some of the concerns which the local community had voiced during the consultation – notably transition plans for individual pupils, particularly those in the lead up to GCSE examinations, and transport to and from alternative schools and its cost. Whilst the signatories noted that Cabinet had considered these concerns in passing its resolution more detail and assurance was requested. Given local rumour over the future of the John Summers High School site, the signatories sought an assurance that there was no plan in place for its future disposal and, should the School be closed, for a commitment that there would be open public consultation on the future options for the site including public open space. The Member Engagement Manager then outlined the four options available to the Committee.

The Chair invited the Call-in signatories to address the Committee. Councillor David Wisinger, as the first of the signatories, said that the reasons for the Call-in concerned issues relating to transport, transitional arrangements, and future use of the John Summers High School site. He explained that pupils of John Summers High and members of the public had raised questions around school transport costs and how the distance from home to school was measured. Questions had also been asked concerning

the financial impact on families due to additional transport costs and whether any financial help would be provided in the future or for the transitional year only. Councillor Wisinger asked if the “safe route to school policy” had been considered in the decision making process and referred to the possible effect that transport issues may have on pupils’ decisions to remain in school for extra curricular activities, particularly during the Winter months.

The Chair invited the decision makers to respond. A briefing note responding to the Initiators’ concerns had been prepared and circulated at the start of the meeting. The Cabinet Member for Education made an initial response and invited the 21st Century Schools Co-ordinator to provide further detail.

The 21st Century Schools Co-ordinator detailed the Authority’s statutory and discretionary transport provision and the current transport arrangements for John Summers High School. He also referred to the transport eligibility (assuming the decision was taken to close John Summers High School) based on predicted number of pupils, home addresses, nearest school and transport from home to school in accordance with the current transport policy. The Chief Executive advised that the three options concerning the future provision of school transport for John Summers High School pupils would be outlined at a meeting of the Cabinet to be held in September 2015.

The 21st Century Schools Co-ordinator responded to the question on safe routes to schools and explained that all applications for home to school transport were considered in line with the criteria in the transport policy to determine if a route was hazardous or not. In response to the further concerns raised by Councillor Wisinger around the measurement of distance between areas and local secondary schools, the 21st Century Schools Co-ordinator drew attention to the maps provided to the Committee which outlined pupil locations and transport zones in relation to Connah’s Quay High School. During discussion it was agreed that the 21st Century Schools Co-ordinator would also provide comparative information based on Hawarden High School.

In response to the concern raised by Councillor Wisinger concerning a lack of public transport in some areas, the 21st Century Schools Co-ordinator explained that if a pupil was eligible for free transport and service provision was not available the Authority would commission a bus for that purpose. Councillor Peter Curtis expressed concerns for pupils who were not eligible for free transport and did not have access to a bus service. He also commented on the additional financial hardship which could be placed on some families due to changes in the working tax credit.

Councillor Glyn Banks raised concerns on transition costs. The Chief Executive reiterated that a report detailing the transport transition issues would be submitted to the Cabinet.

Councillor Mike Peers commented on the financial burden on parents and the potential additional costs to the Authority due to transitional transport

arrangements. The Chief Executive referred to the current cost of transport to John Summers High School and advised that the Authority could consider offering discretionary transitional transport arrangements for the current school cohort at an additional cost of £75k in 2017/18 which would reduce in following years. The 21st Century Schools Co-ordinator reiterated his advice that the Authority provided free transport for children of compulsory school age where a child receiving secondary education lived over three miles from the nearest appropriate school. Free transport was also provided for pupils of statutory school age where a child whose parents/carers were in receipt of Income Support or Working Tax Credit resided more than 2.5 miles from the nearest appropriate school.

On the issue of transition arrangements, Councillor David Wisinger asked if thorough consultation had been undertaken with the traveller community. He said a number of traveller children attended John Summers High School and they had indicated that they did not wish to transfer to another school. Councillor Wisinger asked what support was in place to assist pupils choosing their options in Year 9 and pupils taking examinations in the transitional year. Councillor Wisinger also raised further concerns around the capacity of other nearby secondary schools, for example Hawarden High School, to accommodate additional pupils from John Summers High.

Councillor David Healey expressed a number of concerns around the transitional arrangements for Key Stage 4 pupils at John Summers High School. He raised further concerns regarding curriculum alignment and said there were significant differences in some subjects between secondary schools. He commented on the transfer of pupils in Year 10 from John Summers High to Year 11 in another school and expressed the view that the proposal was unacceptable and flawed. He said that it created a “risk” to the choices for a Year group at John Summers High and also to the examination results for the Year group at another school. Councillor Healey suggested that the Committee consider referring the decision back to Cabinet for reconsideration. He also suggested that the group that would be Year 10 in John Summers High in 2016/17 could move to a new school at the start of academic year (September 2016/17).

The Secondary Schools Officer reported on the transition plan. He explained that as part of the proposals for school organisational change at John Summers High School a draft curriculum transition plan was presented to both Overview & Scrutiny and Cabinet in August 2015. He said it was acknowledged that school organisational change could cause uncertainty for parents/carers, pupils, staff, and the wider community, across a number of issues and that a main factor was continuity of education. The Transition Plan concentrated on the requirements of the learners and aimed to mitigate risk of discontinuity of education. The Secondary Schools Officer referred to the agreement in principle with partnering High schools that they would work with the Council and John Summers High School on all issues around the curriculum including option choices at Key Stage 4. He advised that detailed transition plans would be developed with John Summers High School and

partner schools, particularly Connah's Quay High School, between September 2015 to December 2015, in time for learners, parents and carers to make informed choices prior to considering options for GCSE's and other examination courses. The Council and partnering High schools would also work on a contingency plan should there be a delay in the Ministerial decision which was anticipated end of January 2016. The Secondary Schools Officer provided further detail on the transitional planning.

In response to the question on consultation with the traveller community, the Secondary Schools Officer advised that all pupils at John Summers High School will have an individual pupil plan and gave the same assurance that the individual needs of all pupils would be taken into account throughout the transition planning process.

Regarding the capacity of other local schools to accommodate additional pupils from John Summers High, the Secondary Schools Officer advised that the preferences for Hawarden High School would be managed in line with the current admissions criteria. Pupils for whom it was the nearest school would take priority for places which would displace intake to the school from pupils expressing a preference from further afield.

Councillor Cindy Hinds expressed concerns around the need for future educational provision in Deeside. The 21st Century Schools Co-ordinator reported on the projections for housing yield for the Northern Gateway which was yet to be developed. He advised that the total 'yield' of secondary school age child numbers eligible for admission to John Summers was 231 which had reduced to 199 following new census information. 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 or a 600 places school required at 11-16. The housing yield figures were the maximum numbers and did not take into account parental choice for alternative schools or pupil movement.

The Chief Executive emphasised that the Northern Gateway was a long term development and commented on the uncertainty around housing yield figures and the impact of parental choice. He advised that current and projected pupil numbers for John Summers High School were insufficient for the school to be sustained.

Councillor Aaron Shotton also commented on the uncertainty around the Northern Gateway project in terms of the number of properties to be built by two private developers. He reiterated that the projected 'yield' of secondary school age child numbers eligible for admission to John Summers High was based on the maximum number of properties to be built.

During discussion, the Secondary Schools Officer responded to the further concerns raised by Councillor Healey regarding the movement of children from one school to another and to new teaching groups. He gave an assurance that everything possible would be done to ensure continuity of teaching and curriculum. On the suggestion by Councillor Healey that Year

10 pupils in John Summers High moved a year early, the Secondary Schools Officer advised that this may not be legal and also referred to the matter of parental choice. He commented on the issue of timescales and explained that in addition to planning for the Ministerial decision being in January 2016, as anticipated, the Authority also had to have contingency plans in place should the Minister not make a determination until later in the year.

Councillor David Wisinger raised concerns around the impact of the proposal to close John Summers High School on Queensferry Primary School which shared some of the facilities provided by John Summers High. The 21st Century Schools Co-ordinator advised that capital investment through 21st Century funding would be used to bring Queensferry Primary School up to standard.

Councillor Wisinger referred to the future of the John Summers High School site should the proposal to close the school be approved, and asked for an assurance that there were no plans in place for its disposal to prospective developers. He also sought a commitment that there would be public consultation on the use of the site as a public open space.

The Chief Executive gave an assurance that the land was owned by the Authority for educational purposes and that there were no plans to dispose of the site for any other purpose. He referred to the size of the site, the location, and surrounding amenities and infrastructure, and commented that “open space” was at a premium. The Chief Executive advised that any potential disposal of the site would be a Cabinet decision and public consultation would take place as needed.

Councillor Aaron Shotton took the opportunity to refute rumours over the land if demolition of the John Summers High School building was to take place. He said that if the Minister took the decision to close the School he would be in favour of the land being protected as “open space” for community use in perpetuity

The Chair outlined the Committee’s four options for decision.

Councillor Peter Curtis proposed Option 3 which was seconded by Councillor David Healey. On being put to the vote the proposal was carried; the decision was referred back to Cabinet for reconsideration. Councillors Adele Davies-Cooke and Nigel Steele-Mortimer abstained from the vote.

RESOLVED:

That having considered the decision, the Committee was still concerned about it and referred it back to Cabinet for reconsideration.

26. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were 29 members of the public and two members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 11.00am and ended at 12.22 pm)

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Chairman