

EDUCATION AND YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
28 JUNE 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Thursday, 28 June 2018

PRESENT: Councillor David Healey (Chairman)

Councillors: Janet Axworthy, Geoff Collett, Paul Cunningham, Andy Dunbobbin, Patrick Heesom, Dave Hughes, Kevin Hughes, Tudor Jones, Dave Mackie, Martin White and David Williams

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Lynn Bartlett, David Hýtch and Rebecca Stark

APOLOGIES: Councillors Sian Braun and Ian Smith

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Marion Bateman attended as an observer, together with Councillor Paul Jones of Wrexham County Borough Council

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Ian Roberts, Cabinet Member for Education; Interim Chief Officer (Education & Youth); Senior Manager, School Planning and Provision

IN ATTENDANCE: Education & Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officer

For minute number 7

Arwyn Thomas (Managing Director) and Alwyn Jones (Assistant Director) of GwE

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Collett, Dunbobbin and Kevin Hughes declared a personal interest on Agenda Item 5 'School Modernisation' as they were school governors.

Following officer advice, Councillor Tudor Jones declared a personal interest on the same item as he was a member of the campaign team to prevent the amalgamation of Lixwm and Brynford schools.

6. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 April 2018 were submitted.

Matters Arising

Minute number 46: Integrated Youth Services - Councillor Heesom reminded the Interim Chief Officer that she was to meet with him to discuss his concerns about the wider provision of youth services across the County, adding that his suggestion for a workshop had not been progressed. In recalling the debate, the Chairman said that the Committee had agreed to invite the Youth Council to discuss the issues and report back. This was confirmed by the Facilitator who clarified that the suggestion had not

been agreed by the Committee as part of its resolutions. Councillor Heesom went on to refer to the need for an appropriate mechanism to consult with young people.

On the same item, Councillor Dunbobbin asked that the minutes reflect his comments in favour of the Supporting Service Children in Education (SSCE) campaign on the service child pupil premium on which he had attended a seminar in Cardiff earlier in the month.

The Chairman took the opportunity to commend the Youth Council on its response to the recent announcement by Airbus.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the amendment by Councillor Dunbobbin, the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

7. REGIONAL SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPROVEMENT SERVICE (GWE)

The Interim Chief Officer (Education & Youth) introduced the update from GwE including the annual report 2017/18 identifying strengths in standards, provision and leadership, along with areas for improvement and development.

The Committee welcomed GwE representatives Arwyn Thomas, Managing Director and Alwyn Jones, Assistant Director, who gave a presentation covering the following:

- Wales Reform Journey
- Accountability
- Toward a self improving school system
- Successes
- Challenges

During the presentation, information was shared on preparations for education reform involving the development of a new curriculum with a local rather than national focus and culture shift to support rather than challenge schools. An offer was made to deliver a workshop to Members in the Autumn to provide clarity on the next steps to help understanding of the changes ahead.

In response to a question from Councillor Cunningham on governance arrangements, the Managing Director said that regional and local accountability was in place through the GwE joint committee (comprising representatives from the six local authorities) and regular meetings between GwE representatives and the six Overview & Scrutiny committees. He highlighted the importance of effective communication channels to ensure that schools received adequate support and referred to business plans detailing the offer for each local authority in the region.

Rebecca Stark asked about timescales to show how the eight elements of education reform would come together. The Managing Director said that milestones were set for the initial two year period and a phased approach would be taken to prepare for the reforms in discussion with Welsh Government (WG). Timescales would

be shared via a cluster approach with the aim of each partner reaching the same stage simultaneously. The Interim Chief Officer said that timelines published by WG could be made available to Members and she provided clarification on other timelines that were in the remit of local authorities. In response to concerns about early availability of resources, the Managing Director acknowledged that some materials were slow in emerging and that the preparations would help to achieve more stability in the system. Rebecca Stark also spoke about the need for funding to help schools implement the changes, particularly in the secondary sector. The Managing Director said that representations were being made to WG for funding to support schools in becoming reform ready and he referred to a potential increase in teacher training days to assist schools. The Interim Chief Officer spoke in support of this approach due to the pressures already absorbed by schools and she said there was a degree of optimism for additional funding from the UK Government.

Lynn Bartlett welcomed the focus on support for schools but said that funding was required to support school collaboration. The Managing Director spoke about the importance of directing funding to clusters to enable those schools to make their own key decisions. In response to further comments, he spoke about an increased focus on wellbeing as part of the Curriculum Development element.

Following praise by Councillor Heesom for the vision behind the reforms, the Managing Director said that this was about schools supporting pupils to serve their communities and become active leaders.

David Hýtch called for support across the wider curriculum with reporting mechanisms highlighting pupil achievement in all areas rather than focussing on core subjects. This view was acknowledged and shared by the GwE representatives. In response to concerns about Head Teacher welfare - particularly in the secondary sector - and the effect of GwE 'deep dive' visits, the increased focus on support was highlighted, along with improving language in a positive way and encouraging openness and sharing problems.

Members were advised by the Interim Chief Officer that there were no significant recruitment issues with Head Teachers in Flintshire as senior posts were filled and well supported, with turnover at secondary level due to natural means, eg retirement. Whilst the number of applicants had reduced, the identification of a cohort of emerging prospective future Heads was proving to be effective.

Councillor Roberts spoke about the importance of the School Standards Monitoring Group in providing a measure of challenge to schools on areas of under-performance.

David Hýtch asked about alternative support to replace that previously given by Governors Wales and was told that GwE would work closely with local authority colleagues to ensure that all Governors were captured as part of training.

Councillor Mackie said that the increased time in core subjects and reduced options available to young people conflicted with the aim for broader improvement. He reiterated his concerns that more could be done to ensure that young people received the best support possible which would improve Flintshire's position. He also pointed

out that the drop in performance of all the regional local authorities under GwE since the inception of the service was not replicated elsewhere in Wales.

The Managing Director explained about the funding arrangements to setup GwE when a national approach to challenge had been set. He said that accountability was now higher than ever before and that teachers sharing best practice would support improvement. He referred to the change in demographics over the period and said that GwE had been inspected four times this year and had recognised the positive, quality service provision to schools and local authorities in the region.

The Interim Chief Officer agreed that Flintshire's ranking was unacceptable and that the objective was to exceed the benchmark. In respect of GwE, the service had developed and the shift in focus to increase resources and target support in the secondary sector regionally would help the improvement journey; this approach was reflected in feedback from schools.

Councillor Mackie said it was important for the Committee to be given information on what was being done to seek improvements for Flintshire. Assurance was given by the Managing Director that the detailed plan for Flintshire was subject to quarterly monitoring and shared through performance reporting.

Councillor Axworthy asked if the Estyn report on GwE could be shared and she said that the Committee needed to be clear about data provided on schools. The Interim Chief Officer gave a reminder that information was shared with the Committee in various forms, for example the self-evaluation report at the previous meeting which summarised performance data and improvements. Requests for specific data could be pursued with officers outside the meeting.

The Chairman thanked the GwE representatives for their attendance and positive presentation, and welcomed the support for schools and staff. He proposed that the Committee accept the offer of the Autumn workshop, which was duly agreed.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the presentation on supporting the reform journey be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee accepts the offer of a workshop in the Autumn.

8. SCHOOL MODERNISATION

The Senior Manager, School Planning and Provision, presented an update report on progress with the School Modernisation programme and emerging additional Capital Grant funding streams available through Welsh Government (WG).

Following an overview of progress on the 21st Century Schools programme, he advised that decisions were still awaited from WG on the Infants Class Size Grant bid for Ysgol Glan Aber and the Welsh Medium capital grant bid for Ysgol Glanrafon. Confirmation of the Early Years' Capital Grant was also outstanding along with the qualifying criteria.

Councillor Heesom commented on the need for schools across the County to be given equal consideration for building improvements, in particular Bryn Pennant in Mostyn which was expanding and required roof repairs. This was noted by the Senior Manager who advised that schools with condition issues were retained on a list and brought forward when funding was available. Councillor Heesom also sought an update on Ysgol Mornant in Picton.

Councillor Williams referred to investment at Deeside Sixth and requested a future item on available courses, entry qualifications, student numbers and those dropping out. He asked about future extension of capacity at Castell Alun High School due to the number of housing developments in surrounding areas. He was told that the programme was fluid to allow for additional capacity and that a snapshot of the process would be included in the School Admissions item scheduled for later in the year. The Senior Manager provided Councillor Williams with an update on work at Penyffordd School and advised that traffic issues raised by the school would be picked up through the regular meetings.

In commending the Cabinet decision on Lixwm and Brynford Schools, Councillor Tudor Jones suggested that options could be explored for Brynford to expand the school with joint use as a community village hall, which could attract WG grant funding. He spoke about the need to support Ysgol Mornant where the community was investing in the Welsh language and said that engaging with communities could identify a means of both parties achieving their objectives.

Councillor Roberts explained that the basis of the Cabinet decision was due to the scale of support to retain education in those communities. It was hoped that the Council could work with those communities to achieve a successful federation.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee notes the contents of the report and progress of the School Modernisation programme; and
- (b) That the Committee notes the requests for further information and relevant investment outlined by Members.

9. YEAR-END COUNCIL PLAN MONITORING REPORT 2017/18

The Interim Chief Officer presented the 2017/18 year-end progress report on the Council Plan for 2017-23 providing analysis on the 'Learning Council' priority which was relevant to the Committee.

The Facilitator gave a reminder of the forthcoming Member workshop to help understanding of performance reporting.

Councillor Mackie agreed to discuss separately with officers a number of items in the previous report that were missing from this update. He questioned the end date for action 3.1.1.2 on enhancing skills which was recorded as 50% complete and asked if the risk rating on leadership capacity not meeting school needs should be Red to reflect the difficulty in recruiting teachers in certain subjects.

On the latter point, Councillor Roberts was aware of issues of teacher supply and he cited various options to address this including the benefits of Key Stage 2 teachers providing cover at Key Stage 3. He spoke about the need for schools to work in partnership with trainers, and welcomed the new teacher training partnership between Chester and Bangor Universities.

The Interim Chief Officer explained that some measures had been adapted to become more specific across all portfolios. She advised that whilst there were no major problems recruiting Head Teachers in Flintshire, issues had been identified at some schools recruiting at senior to middle tiers of leadership. As a way forward, she suggested engaging with schools through the Secondary Heads' Federation to identify pressure points. An overview of anonymised results could then be reported back to the Committee.

This was welcomed by Councillor Mackie who suggested repeating the practice to identify trends over time. The Interim Chief Officer said that ongoing issues with individuals schools were addressed through advisory roles and school monitoring procedures.

The Facilitator advised that at a recent meeting, the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee had agreed to await the action plan to address areas of under-performance with a Red and Amber risk rating with a downturn performance trend.

In response to a question from Councillor Kevin Hughes, the Interim Chief Officer said that uncertainty on grant funding was a continuing concern. She welcomed key Ministerial decisions on the reinstatement of the School Uniform Grant to cover Year 1 as well as and Year 7 pupils, and Flintshire's allocation of the Minority Achievement Grant following successful lobbying. There was no clarification on grant funding for small schools and rural schools, and officers continued to make the case to WG on the importance of sharing information at an earlier stage to enable forward planning.

Councillor Kevin Hughes suggested that Members engage with schools to encourage parents to recycle pupil uniforms.

Councillor Roberts expressed his gratitude to the Senior Manager, School Planning and Provision, and his team for the volume of work undertaken to produce the recent report to Cabinet on school modernisation.

Following comments by David Hýtch on the increased percentage of attendance across the portfolio of Pupil Referral Units, Councillor Roberts referred to the report on School Exclusions scheduled in the Forward Work Programme.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the Year-End Council Plan Monitoring Report 2017/18 to monitor under performance.

10. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

In presenting the current Forward Work Programme for consideration, the Facilitator referred to a suggestion at the previous meeting for a workshop on post-16 provision which had been scheduled immediately after the September meeting. Councillor Roberts asked that representatives of Deeside Sixth be invited to attend the workshop.

Councillor Kevin Hughes spoke about the importance of tackling period poverty due to concerns about the number of young girls unable to afford sanitary products. He said it was crucial that schools provide support by keeping a free of charge supply and appointing a named female point of contact. He went on to refer to the availability of Welsh Government funding to address the problem and improve facilities in schools.

The Interim Chief Officer acknowledged this national issue which was also affecting school attendance figures, and explained that a steering group had been set up to review and formalise arrangements at secondary schools in Flintshire, all of which had supplies of products available. A range of activities were being implemented including the development of a corporate reporting mechanism (in conjunction with the Youth Participation team) to ensure that support was correctly targeted and the Youth Council was engaged in helping to promote the resources and support available. In order to maximise grant funding, options were being explored with product manufacturers and neighbouring Authorities to achieve value for money.

Councillor Cunningham thanked Councillor Hughes for raising the topic and the Council for putting actions into place.

Following a query by David Hÿtch, the Facilitator advised that the information reports on incidents of arson, vandalism and burglaries in Flintshire schools were being pursued with the relevant officer.

Councillor Roberts suggested that the next annual progress update from GwE be scheduled as a standalone item at a special meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme as amended, be approved; and
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

11. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2pm and ended at 4.45pm)

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Chairman