

EDUCATION AND YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
31 JANUARY 2019

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, Flintshire on Thursday, 31 January 2019

PRESENT: Councillor David Healey (Chairman)

Councillors: Paul Cunningham, Andy Dunbobbin, Patrick Heesom, Dave Hughes, Kevin Hughes, Tudor Jones, Dave Mackie, Ian Smith, Martin White and David Williams

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: David Hÿtch, Rita Price and Rebecca Stark

SUBSTITUTE: Councillor: Gladys Healey (for Geoff Collett)

APOLOGY: Councillor Sian Braun

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Aaron Shotton, Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance; Councillor Ian Roberts, Cabinet Member for Education; Chief Officer (Education & Youth); and Finance Manager (People & Resources)

School Improvement Senior Manager - for minute number 38

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

34. OPENING COMMENTS

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman welcomed pupils and representatives from Argoed High School who were in attendance to observe the meeting.

35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Rebecca Stark declared a personal interest on the 2019/20 Council Fund Budget Update as her children were in secondary education.

36. 2019/20 COUNCIL FUND BUDGET UPDATE

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) presented a report on the latest Education funding position in approaching the closing stage of the budget-setting process for 2019/20. Whilst there had been some improvement on the original forecast, the Local Government Final Settlement remained inadequate to meet the funding requirements of the Council.

The Finance Manager explained that many Education services were reliant on grant funding which was being eroded year on year. An extensive review of budgets had identified that there was no scope for further efficiencies

beyond those detailed in the report - without significant risk to the resilience of Council services and school standards. With additional funding from Welsh Government (WG) towards the cost of implementing the national pay award for 2019/20, the Council had made provision for an uplift in base funding to meet 1% as a minimum with schools expected to absorb the remaining balance. A further cost pressure to schools was expected in September 2019 when a further pay award was due. In addition, there was no information at this stage as to whether WG would receive supplementary funding to support the increase in teachers' pensions which posed a further estimated risk of over £2m.

During the budget process, the risk around the impact to services and standards had been raised with Ministers. There had been extensive engagement with schools and partners on shared responsibilities and this open dialogue had been well received.

Councillor Shotton recalled discussion at the County Council meeting earlier in the week which highlighted the impact of cost pressures on services. Whilst the increases in pay awards for teachers and non-teaching staff were welcomed, these pressures had not been fully recognised by the UK Government or WG. To assist schools with these significant in-year cost pressures, a 2.47% uplift to the schools delegated budget was being recommended to County Council. On the increase in teachers' pensions, Councillor Shotton suggested that Members may wish to consider engaging with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to seek assurances through the UK Treasury that funding would be forthcoming.

Councillor Heesom welcomed the update in advance of the overall budget discussion at County Council on 19 February. He commented on the importance of funding to support sixth form provision in the County. The Chief Officer and Finance Manager advised that there was no information at this stage from WG on grant funding for Post-16 education in 2019/20 and that Education Improvement Grant funding would be allocated through the regional GwE service. In attending national and regional meetings, officers were continuing to highlight the importance of timely information on funding to enable the Council and schools to plan effectively.

David Hÿtch said that the national pay award imposed by the UK Government did not help with recruitment and retention at schools which was a UK-wide problem. He welcomed the increase but expressed concerns about the capacity of schools to absorb additional cost pressures, particularly due to the number of secondary schools already in a deficit position. The point was acknowledged by officers who said that the Council would continue to work with schools to target support where needed.

Councillor Roberts said that the seriousness of the situation demonstrated the importance of the Council maintaining adequate levels of reserves. He spoke about ongoing communications with local MPs on the need for those imposing the national pay award to provide the necessary funding for its implementation.

When asked by Councillor Dunbobbin about grant funding to support the children of those serving in the Armed Forces, it was explained that information was still awaited on allocations to certain groups (as set out in the appendix to the report). Whilst additional grants were sometimes made available at later stages in the process, this created challenges in planning.

In referring to other pressures faced by teachers in their profession, Councillor Kevin Hughes said that the use of reserves to balance the budget for 2019/20 would only make the process next year even more difficult. His suggestion that the Committee make written representations for a funding solution to the nationally awarded increases was acknowledged by the Chief Officer who explained that a letter had already been sent and that a copy would be shared with the Committee along with the positive response from David Hanson MP.

Councillor Shotton reminded Members that the request for fairer funding formed part of the Council's #BacktheAsk campaign.

Rebecca Stark raised concerns about the impact of implementing the new legislation on Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and also the rising demand for complex Out of County Placement referrals. The Chief Officer said that the significant cost implications from the legislative changes had been identified as a key risk as the financial impact could not be assessed at this stage and that dialogue would be maintained with WG on the need for financial investment. As an ongoing significant risk, spend on Out of County Placements was subject to robust monitoring and challenge, and opportunities were being explored to expand local provision. Reports on both issues would be scheduled for the annual joint Overview & Scrutiny meeting in June.

Councillor White spoke about the need for intervention by WG to provide the necessary funding to enable schools to improve standards.

Following comments from Councillor Jones about the wording used in the third recommendation, he proposed an amendment to more accurately reflect the discussion. During discussion, further amendments were agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee notes the updated budget forecast for the Council as the basis for setting a legal and balanced budget for 2019/20;
- (b) That the Committee notes the total funding uplift which is proposed for schools in 2019/20;
- (c) That the Committee notes that this year the Council will be funding 1% of the teachers' pay award with schools expected to disappointedly absorb the balance of the cost;

- (d) That the Committee notes that funding proposed for 2019/20 does not include any allowance for the increase in teachers' pension costs or the teachers' pay award from September 2019; and
- (e) That the Committee objects to the process of national awarded pay awards not being fully funded by Governments.

37. WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN (WESP)

The Chief Officer presented a report on the Council's progress on its Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) to meet the targets and outcomes set by Welsh Government (WG) to promote Welsh-medium education, increase the number of pupils accessing education through the medium of Welsh and improve standards of pupil attainment in both Welsh first and second language.

A multi-agency forum was responsible for monitoring and delivering implementation of the WESP and additional temporary capacity within the Council was being provided by Sian Hilton. The forum reviewed progress by three sub-groups focussing on Standards, Provision and Workforce. As part of the report, attention was drawn to the Council's success in attracting capital investment from WG at 100% intervention rate to increase capacity at Ysgol Glanrafon and provide wraparound early years provision. A number of key successes in meeting WG targets for 2018-19 were also highlighted.

The Chairman thanked officers for the report and welcomed the progress made to date.

As Chairman of the forum, Councillor Roberts spoke about the Council's commitment to promote the education of children in Welsh medium schools and develop bilingualism in English-medium schools. He referred to the positive impact of Urdd in encouraging young people to compete through the medium of Welsh and stressed the importance of developing the language outside the school/workplace. He said that the WG's ambitious target of achieving 1m Welsh speakers by 2050 would only be met by increasing the number of Welsh speakers in areas such as Flintshire. He went on to commend Ysgol Gwenffrwd in Holywell on the results of its recent Estyn inspection.

Following concerns by Rebecca Stark about the road infrastructure around Ysgol Glanrafon, the Chief Officer advised that officers were aware of the issues and that a traffic impact assessment would take into consideration the management of traffic flow and pupil safety.

In response to comments from Councillor Smith, Councillor Roberts and the Chief Officer said that representations had been made on the need for WG to provide additional funding for the growth and development of smaller emerging Welsh-medium schools as they were being established.

Whilst welcoming positive outcomes by Welsh second-language learners in English-medium primary schools, David Hýtch raised concerns

about the effect of future curriculum changes on English-medium secondary schools.

Rebecca Stark also felt that the reduction of Welsh language options at secondary level could lead to pupils opting not to pursue another language.

Councillor Gladys Healey called for industries to do more to incorporate use of the Welsh language into the workplace.

Councillor Mackie read an extract from a report which highlighted the difficulties experienced by secondary schools in recruiting Welsh speaking teachers.

Progress on the WESP was well received by Councillor Jones who spoke about the growth of the Welsh language in urban areas. He thanked Members for participating in the recent survey across the Council which showed progression in the Welsh language.

The Chief Officer acknowledged concerns such as the impact of reduced options for pupils and the investment required in teacher training. Key factors such as these were being identified by the sub-groups reporting to the forum to inform the action plan, eg working with Coleg Cambria to create more opportunities for young people to develop Welsh language skills.

Following discussion, Councillor Roberts suggested that the Committee write to the Minister to express the concerns raised. An amended set of recommendations were agreed to reflect the debate.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee commends the progress made by the Council against the targets in the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan;
- (b) That the effective multi-agency partnership working within the Welsh in Education Strategic Forum, which created and monitored the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, be noted; and
- (c) That the Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, write to Kirsty Williams AM, Cabinet Secretary for Education, outlining the following concerns raised:-
 - The need to ensure sufficient numbers of Welsh teachers in all curriculum subjects;
 - The revenue costs involved in establishing new Welsh medium provision;
 - Concerns around the limiting subject options for pupils if Welsh Language was made a mandatory GCSE; and
 - A recognition that if WG were to meet their ambitious target of 1M Welsh speakers in Wales by 2050 then this would be realised by increasing the number of Welsh speakers in areas such as Flintshire.

38. LEARNING FROM THE SCHOOL PERFORMANCE MONITORING GROUP

The Chief Officer presented an update report on the work of the School Performance Monitoring Group (SPMG) which was a mechanism for supporting school improvement.

The approach taken by the SPMG was to provide a constructive and robust process to identify - together with schools - any areas of improvement in need of support. It was reported that the number of schools subject to the process had significantly reduced. A list of common themes identified key areas on which the regional service GwE could respond and target support appropriately, with two key areas being the quality of middle leadership at secondary level and the tracking pupil performance.

The Chairman congratulated the School Improvement Senior Manager on her appointment and commended the progress which had been made.

In response to comments from Councillor Heesom on the composition of the SPMG, it was explained that membership had been by open invitation. Members expressing an interest in joining the group were encouraged, including Councillor Heesom who wished to represent his area.

Whilst acknowledging the importance of school improvement, David Hýtch said that greater emphasis should be placed on support rather than challenge, due to the range of pressures faced by schools. The Chief Officer spoke about her statutory responsibility for education standards for the interests of learners. She said that there were various reasons why schools could find themselves in difficulty and that both challenge and support were necessary to understand the reasons and work effectively with GwE to target support. Feedback from schools going through the process had been positive and meetings were conducted in a professional manner involving School Improvement Advisors.

Having participated on the SPMG membership, Rebecca Stark felt that the experience was positive in identifying the support required.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the work undertaken by the School Performance Monitoring Group be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee endorses the School Performance Monitoring Group to continue to work in the same way with targeted schools.

39. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

In presenting the current Forward Work Programme for consideration, the Facilitator advised that following earlier discussion, a report on Out of

County Placement provision would be scheduled for the joint meeting with the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 7 June 2019.

Members were also notified of workshops on School Repairs and Maintenance (12 April at 2pm) and Post-16 Education Provision and Consultation on Post-16 Transport (11 February at 2pm). On the latter, Councillor Williams asked that information on courses be made available, as previously requested.

RESOLVED:

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

40. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 2pm and ended at 4.10pm)

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Chairman