

EDUCATION AND YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 DECEMBER 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Room, County Hall, Mold, Flintshire at 2.00 pm on Thursday, 20 December 2018

PRESENT: Councillor David Healey (Chairman)

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

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Lynn Bartlett and David Hytch

APOLOGIES: Mrs Rebecca Stark.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Aaron Shotton

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Ian Roberts, Cabinet Member for Education; Chief Officer (Education & Youth); and Admissions Manager

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

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Andy Dunbobbin declared a personal interest in agenda item 4 – School Admission Policy Overview, and agenda item 5 – School Modernisation, as he was Chair of Governors at Connah’s Quay High School.

Councillor Janet Axworthy also declared a personal interest in agenda item 4 – School Admission Policy Overview, and agenda item 5 – School Modernisation, as she was a Governor at Hawarden High School.

Councillor David Healey declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 – School Modernisation, as he was a Governor at Castell Alun High School.

Councillor Geoff Collett declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 – School Modernisation, as he was a Governor at Ysgol Pen Coch, Mold.

28. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2018, were submitted.

Apologies

Councillor Patrick Heesom said he had submitted his apologies to the meeting and asked that the minutes be amended to record this. He also commented on the Youth Club building within his ward and raised concerns that there was a

fire risk given the current condition of the building. The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) explained that this matter was in hand.

Matters arising

Learner Outcomes 2018 (Provisional)

Councillor Patrick Heesom asked for an update on the letter sent on behalf of the Committee to the WJEC to outline its concerns around recent English change boundaries and inviting representatives of the WJEC to attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the issue. The Facilitator advised that she had circulated the response from the WJEC to the Committee. The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) provided an update on the meeting which had been held between Headteachers and the WJEC since the last Committee meeting. She reported that the strong concerns which had been expressed by Headteachers, and also in local and regional responses, had been robustly put forward to the WJEC during the meeting and more detailed analysis had been requested. The Chief Officer emphasised that explanations to the concerns raised were being actively pursued and reassurance was sought that a similar situation would not occur in the future. She said this was a matter of significant concern across the whole of Wales and there was a co-ordinated campaign to ensure the matter was being fully addressed.

During discussion the Committee agreed that a further letter be sent to the WJEC, to include its knowledge of the ongoing regional representations being made, and to explain that the attendance of representatives of the WJEC at a meeting with the Committee would not be required at this time, however, the Committee would continue to monitor the situation and invite them to a future meeting if appropriate.

Mr. David Hytch expressed concerns around students who may have been disadvantaged by the recent changes. Councillor Ian Roberts and the Chief Officer acknowledged the points made and commented that confidence in the system had been undermined across Wales and referred to the difficulties which also experienced in Maths and Science as well as English.

Councillor Dave Mackie expressed disappointment at the response which had been received from the WJEC to the letter sent by the Committee which he felt had not fully addressed the Committee's concerns.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That subject to the amendment listed above, the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.
- (b) That a response letter be sent to the WJEC explaining that their attendance at a meeting with the Committee would not be required at this time, but that the Committee would continue to monitor the situation and invite representatives of the WJEC to a future meeting if appropriate.

29. SCHOOL ADMISSIONS POLICY OVERVIEW

The Chief Officer introduced the report to provide a policy overview and update on numbers. She gave background information and invited the Admissions Manager to present the report.

The Admissions Manager reported on the main considerations, as detailed in the report, and advised that the capacity of all schools in Wales was calculated in accordance with the National Assessment methodology provided by Welsh Government and all schools had an agreed Admission Number which was derived from the calculated capacity. She explained that there was no automatic right to a school place at a particular school and if more applications are received than places available places must be allocated in accordance with the agreed oversubscription criteria set out in the admissions policy.

The Admissions Manager advised that it was important that applications for admission were returned by the published closing date as late applications were dealt with after those received on time. This meant that if a preferred school was full, even if the school concerned was closest to the child's home address, a late application would be refused and the parent offered a right of appeal to an independent appeal panel. This process was in accordance with the published admission arrangements.

Councillor Kevin Hughes referred to the appeal process and the number of appeals which were upheld. The Chief Officer reiterated that if an application for admission was refused the parent had a right of appeal to an appeal panel which was independent and impartial. She also explained that oversubscription did not necessarily result in appeals as parents may accept a second or third preference school or an alternative school with a space available.

In response to the questions raised by Councillor Geoff Collett concerning new build of residential developments and the impact on local schools, the Chief Officer gave an outline of how the Authority planned and managed school places and the data used to assist. In response to the further comments raised by Councillor Collet the Chief Officer said that if Members had a specific query or concern regarding a school(s) in their Ward they could contact her and she would demonstrate in further detail how school places were planned and managed.

Councillor Geoff Collet commented on the admission process to secondary schools. Councillor Ian Roberts advised that admission into a primary school did not guarantee a child a place in a secondary school in the same area. Officers emphasised there were no designated school places or catchment areas. The Admissions Officer commented on the work undertaken to ensure parents made informed decisions and said that schools were expected to be compliant with the information provided to parents. The Committee supported the suggestion that a tick box be added to the on-line admission application form for primary schools to ensure that parents

understood that the admission into a primary school did not mean automatic admission into the secondary school in that area.

Councillor Andy Dunbobbin commented on the Council's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant and asked if discretion for children of Armed Forces personnel was applied when considering school admission applications. The Admissions Officer explained that the Covenant did not allow for discretion to children of Armed Forces personnel but there was discretion for reception aged children as well as Year 7 children.

Members expressed appreciation to the Chief Officer, the Admissions Manager and the Admissions Team for their excellent work concerning the school admissions process.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That a tick box be added to the on-line admission application form for primary schools to ensure that parents understood that the admission into a primary school did not mean automatic admission into the secondary school in that area; and
- (c) That the Committee recognise the excellent work of the admission team.

30. SCHOOL MODERNISATION

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) presented the report to update the Committee on progress made with the School Modernisation Programme and additional Capital Grant funding streams available through the Welsh Government (WG).

The Chief Officer reported on the main considerations, as detailed in the report. She referred to the 21st Century Programme (Band A) and advised that projects at Holywell Learning Campus and Deeside 6th were completed on time and within budget. The remaining projects were at Connah's Quay High School and Penyffordd County Primary School which would effectively bring the Band A programme to a close. The Chief Officer also reported on the Brynford and Lixwm area review, and consultation on federation between Nercwys Voluntary Aided School and Nannerch Voluntary Controlled School.

Referring to the 21st Century Schools and Education Programme (Band B) she reported that Welsh Ministers had confirmed that this would be funded by both capital and revenue budgets. The Chief Officer advised that local authorities had recently received positive news from the WG regarding improved intervention rates by the WG for the onward investment programme, however, meeting the costs of the Council contribution would still be a challenge. The Chief Officer also reported on developments concerning the capital project for Portfolio Pupil Referral Unit (PPRU) and for Queensferry CP,

the WG Infants Class Size Grant, Council Funded Programme, WG Welsh Medium Grant, and WG Childcare Grant.

In response to the comments made by Councillor Patrick Heesom on the design of some new school buildings, the Chief Officer advised that a rigorous process of consultation was undertaken with all key stakeholders before the design of a new school building was approved. She also commented on the scientific and technical standards which had to be met with new build projects. In response to the further comments made by Councillor Heesom, the Chief Officer reported on progress on the School Modernisation Plan which she explained was regularly reviewed to address provision within the County. The Chief Officer offered to meet with Councillor Heesom to discuss in detail any specific matters he had concerning provision in his Ward.

Councillor Dave Mackie questioned the date of the Cabinet meeting in section 1.18 of the report. The Chief Officer said that this date was incorrect and she would circulate a copy of the Cabinet report which detailed the decision for work to be undertaken concurrently with the same contractor/team for the capital improvement project at Connah's Quay High School. During discussion officers responded to the further questions raised by Councillor Mackie concerning capital funding and the Mutual Investment Model (MIM).

In response to a question from Councillor Ian Smith around private sector borrowing and interest rates, the Chief Officer asked Councillor Smith to send her the specific question following the meeting in order to provide a response to the Committee.

In response to a suggestion made by Councillor Tudor Jones the Committee agreed that an all Member workshop be arranged in order to share detailed information on the condition surveys for repairs and maintenance of each individual school across Flintshire.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress of the School Modernisation Programme be noted; and
- (b) That a workshop for all Members be arranged in order to share detailed information on the condition surveys for repairs and maintenance of each individual school across Flintshire.

31. COUNCIL PLAN 2018/19 MID-YEAR MONITORING REPORT

The Chief Officer introduced a report to present the monitoring of progress at the mid-year point 2018/19 for the Council Plan priority 'Learning Council' relevant to the Committee.

The Chief Officer advised that the mid-year monitoring report showed that 88% of activities were making good progress with 81% likely to achieve their planned outcomes. 79% of the performance indicators had met or

exceeded their targets. Risks were being managed with a minority of 18% being assessed as major. The report was an exception based report and therefore focussed on the areas of under-performance.

The Chief Officer referred to the performance progress report which was appended to the report. Referring to indicator 3.1.2.1 she advised that there was currently only one school in an Estyn statutory category of concern. The Chief Officer also referred to the risks associated with Additional Learning Needs reforms and advised that a report would be submitted to the meeting of the Committee scheduled on 16 May, to provide an update on the legislative changes. The Chief Officer advised that the sustainability of grant funding for education continued to pose a significant and live risk in a number of areas and referred to the Teachers' Pay Award for 2018-19 and 2019-20, increased employer pension contributions, and grant funding for schools.

In response to the comments raised by Councillor Patrick Heesom concerning the provision of Youth Services in his area, the Chief Officer explained that the Authority was meeting its statutory requirements and was providing high level services to meet the future needs of young people. She emphasised that the lack of funding was a national issue and therefore the service had to be more creative in the way youth services were provided going forward.

Mr David Hytch commented on the backlog of known repair and maintenance works within the schools portfolio. The Chief Officer acknowledged the points made by Mr. Hytch and explained that schools were informed of their position in terms of repair and maintenance works being undertaken through the detailed information on the condition survey report for repairs and maintenance of each individual school across Flintshire.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

32. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme for consideration. During discussion the Committee agreed the following changes to the Programme:-

- that the Healthy Schools and Pre-School Programme report be moved back from the meeting scheduled on 31 January to 21 March;
- that a report on Post 16 Transport be submitted to the meeting of the Committee to be held on 16 May; and
- that a joint meeting with the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee also be arranged during May 2019

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

33. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press or public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.10pm)

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Chairman