

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 DECEMBER 2020

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Education, Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Thursday 17th December 2020.

PRESENT: Councillor David Healey (Chair)

Councillors: Janet Axworthy, Sian Braun, Bob Connah, Paul Cunningham, Gladys Healey, Joe Johnson, Tudor Jones, Dave Mackie and Ian Smith

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Lynn Bartlett, David Hytch, Rebecca Stark and Wendy White

APOLOGY: Senior Manager School Improvement Systems

SUBSTITUTIONS: Councillors: Andy Dunbobbin (for Martin White) and Patrick Heesom (for David Williams)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor David Williams attended as an observer

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Ian Roberts, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education; Chief Executive; Chief Officer (Education & Youth); Primary Learning Advisor; Managing Director of Aura Leisure & Libraries, Libraries Development Manager, Leisure Development Manager, Finance and Commercial Manager, Business Improvement & Performance Manager

Mr. David Edwards and Mr. Martyn Froggett (GwE) for minute number 24

IN ATTENDANCE:

Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator, Democratic Services Officer and Democratic Services Support Officer

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Councillor Tudor Jones declared a personal interest in Agenda item 10, as Chair of Trustees at the Holywell Leisure Centre.

21. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 November, 2020 were received.

Councillor David Mackie proposed that the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. The proposal was seconded by Mr David Hytch.

RESOLVED:

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

22. EMERGENCY SITUATION BRIEFING

The Chief Executive referred to the Briefing Note he had circulated to Members earlier in the week and agreed for this to be sent to non-councillor members together with the Betsi Cadwaladr update on the Vaccination Programme and the Welsh Government (WG) document “Coronavirus Control Plan Alert Levels in Wales” which was published following the First Minister’s Statement. He referred to the implementation and speed of the new level 4 restrictions which the First Minister had announced earlier in the week which had included a clear list of services which were permitted to remain open. He reported on the encouraging pilot of the new Pfizer vaccine in a local care home in New Brighton which was a positive step forward.

The Chief Executive commented on the extensive press coverage on the major disparity of reporting of Welsh infection figures and to a discussion held with the Leader to assess the impact for Flintshire. The incidents rates were already in the system and that overall the numbers had not increased significantly. Once all the information on un-deferred cases were collated there would be a better understanding of the overall picture and it was hoped that Flintshire’s incidents rates did not rise as we entered the Christmas period.

The Leader of the Councillor commented that the situation in Wales was serious and reported on a telephone conference he had attended alongside the Chief Officer with all Head Teachers in the county regarding the re-opening of schools in January, 2021. He also reported on discussions with the Education Minister and other senior Ministers at WG regarding pupils returning in January.

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) reported that WG had provided local authorities with flexibility with regard to the start of the new term but she reassured the committee that schools were open but that because of the impact and spread of the virus over the Christmas period the method of delivery of education may change. She confirmed the Council would be recommending that all schools should deliver online learning for the first week of the new term with as few pupils as possible entering the buildings but there would still need to be provision for vulnerable children and children and young people of key workers. WG had requested all face to face learning commence on the 18th January but the situation was constantly changing and discussions would be held with Head Teachers and Officers following the Christmas period to look at the advice, data and impact on schools to assess whether it was feasible to return to school or continue with the blended learning approach. Head Teachers were supportive of this approach but wanted to ensure parents were informed as soon as possible and that all arrangements

The Chair asked whether support for vulnerable and key critical worker pupils was being provided within the hub and said the impact on working parents having to arrange cover for children especially at short notice was a concern. He also sought clarification on the definition of “key worker”. In response the Chief Officer said that WG had been late sending out their list of keyworkers and schools did not have sufficient time to put arrangements in place. WG had been very clear in its guidance which would form part of the Covid legislation and included a definitive list for key workers. The Guidance stated that if either parent was a keyworker then they would be able to access that support for their children. This had been formally communicated to schools and at the meeting earlier today and she anticipated that this would not be an issue in January.

Mr Hytch asked if the provision for key workers for vulnerable children was being provided at the hub similar to what happened earlier in the year and was this information in the public knowledge at present. In response the Chief Officer confirmed it was agreed with Head Teachers that the communication would be sent to schools tomorrow as it was in the process of being translated. With regard to the Hub it was confirmed the council was not reverting to a resilience hub model as unlike the last lockdown, schools had operated in a Covid secure way since September and it was felt that they should make their own provision for their own vulnerable learners and their families. This had been endorsed by Head Teachers at the meeting that morning.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal update be noted.

23. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the draft Forward Work Programme and reported that there had been no changes to the items listed since the last meeting. The actions arising from the last meeting had been completed as shown at Appendix 2 of the report. The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) provided an update on the joint meeting held between Education & Youth and Social Services officers, where it had been agreed that a report on bringing health and social care staff together to provide intensive assessment and therapeutic support for young people who don't meet the threshold for CAMHS be presented to the joint meeting of the Education, Youth & Culture and Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committees, scheduled for 17 June, 2021.

In response to a question from Mr. David Hytch, the Facilitator reported that the Theatr Clwyd Shadow Board had met on 18 November to consider that the trade union have a representative on the Board. Liam Evans-Ford had confirmed that the Board had not agreed to progress this at this time but would re-consider this suggestion at a later date.

The recommendations outlined within the report were moved by Councillor Paul Cunningham and seconded by Councillor Tudor Jones.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be noted;
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises; and
- (c) That the progress made in completing the outstanding actions be noted.

24. BLENDED LEARNING

The Chair welcomed Jane Borthwick to the meeting, who had recently been seconded to the Education portfolio to provide additional support undertaking the role of Primary Learning Advisor. He also welcomed David Edwards and Martyn Froggett from GwE to the meeting.

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) introduced the blended learning report, advising that the Covid-19 pandemic had accelerated the introduction of a blended learning approach in Flintshire schools. The report provided an overview on how blended learning was progressing and the appendices to the report outlined the good practices undertaken across Flintshire schools.

The Chief Officer greatly appreciated of the support provided by the Regional School Improvement Service (GwE) to staff and learners which had enabled staff at schools to improve their digital skills, their knowledge of different ways learning could be delivered and the variety of learning platforms available. The report provided an overview of how this approach had been developed since March, 2020 and what had been achieved. The Chief Officer referred to the significant £50m investment by Welsh Government (WG) through the Hwb Programme and the support provided to learners who did not have electronic devices or broadband via the Hwb and the Council to enable them to access the online offer.

David Edwards and Martyn Froggett provided a detailed presentation which covered the following areas:-

- Blended Learning
- Why was Blended Learning being focused on now?
- What does Blended Learning look like?
- The four principles
- What does Blended Learning look like in practice
- Next Steps
- Blended Learning in High Schools
- Planning for Blended Learning
- Progress so far

It was agreed that a copy of the presentation slides be circulated to the Committee following the meeting.

The Chair and Leader of the Council thanked David Edwards and Martyn Froggett for the work they had undertaken in supporting schools during the emergency situation and congratulated all school staff for their hard work in meeting the challenge.

Councillor Dave Mackie thanked the officers for the presentation and report. He commented on the Estyn review of how schools and local authorities had been supporting learners during the emergency situation and asked that the feedback from Estyn be shared with the Committee. He also commented on the concern around children who did not have access to broadband or digital devices and the negative impact this would have on their education. The Chief Officer confirmed that the formal feedback letter on blended learning from Estyn would be presented to the Committee in the new year.

In response to the concerns around learners accessing education services, the Primary Learner Advisor advised that work was being undertaken to carry out an assessment to identify the levels of access to devices and broadband for learners across Flintshire. The outcome of this assessment could be presented to the Committee, at a later date, as part of the update report on the Hwb Digital Programme for Wales. The Chief Officer confirmed that a large number of devices had been provided to schools to distribute to learners who did not have access to digital devices at home. She referred to the resources available through the Hwb Digital Programme for Wales and the supply of 200 recycled Council laptops which had been distributed to schools.

Mr David Hytch commended the effort of all school staff during the emergency situation and also thanked GwE for their leadership and support during the implementation of on-line learning. He commented on the functionality of broadband and asked if schools on adjacent sites were able to deliver on-line classes at the same time and asked if further investment in technology would assist in improving broadband at schools. He also commented on pupils being grouped into 'bubbles' at school and commented on the difficulties of pupils remaining in a classroom and a teacher coming to them if it was a subject where specialist equipment was needed. Also it was difficult to group pupils into 'bubbles' on their ability as they did not remain in their sets in a school setting but would be taught in their set classroom online which could cause some confusion.

The Chief Officer that the Hwb Digital Programme for Wales sought to improve the digital network of all schools and that the outcome of the assessment to establish the levels of access to devices and broadband for learners across Flintshire would assist in identifying the improvements needed. The assessment would also provide evidence to WG of the demand needed in Wales so that appropriate resources could be distributed. Martyn Froggett commented on the challenges for schools to ensure the

health and safety of pupils and reported that this had resulted in arrangements for setting arrangements to be amended with pupils being taught in mixed ability classes.

In response to a question from Councillor Paul Cunningham around the communication with Trade Unions, the Chief Officer reported that there had been national engagement with WG and that there had been no challenges on a local level. David Edwards advised that one of the significant considerations of implementing blended learning was around the well-being of school staff and one of the benefits of its implementation had been around improved communication, and he therefore did not envisage blended learning disappearing once the emergency situation had ended.

Councillor Gladys Healey also thanked GwE, all school staff and Council officers for their hard work during the emergency situation. She asked what support was in place for children who required additional support if English was not their first language, they had dyslexia or were not confident using digital devices. The Chief Officer reported on the additional support provided by the Inclusion Team and explained that the way in which lessons were planned provided support for children who required it. The Primary Learning Advisor confirmed that pupils who were identified as requiring additional learning needs had an individual plan or would form part of a larger plan within the schools. These pupils would be split into teams and allocated different work with the support of teaching assistants and support staff.

In response to a question from Mrs. Lynn Bartlett around anxiety, the Chief Officer advised that the Inclusion Team were providing advice and guidance to schools in dealing with increased anxiety due to the emergency situation. She also outlined the work of the School Counselling Team who worked across all schools to provide support where incidents had been identified.

Mrs Bartlett had a question on the well-being of pupils and that currently we are constantly teaching children about hygiene and had concerns about some children becoming hypervigilant about hygiene issues and asked if this was being considered moving forward and whether schools were being given advice for when this becomes an anxiety. In response the Chief Officer said the way we were living with all the stresses we were having to work through was going to manifest in some ways but she was not aware of this. The Inclusion Team provided advice and guidance to schools and felt Head Teachers would ask the Team if they had concerns on this but agreed to refer this to the School Counselling Team who work across all schools to ensure Head Teachers were able to identify these issues and could call on the Team for support.

In response to a question from Cllr Ian Smith about how the £50m funding through the Hwb Digital Programme was shared between local authorities and how much it amounted to per pupil, the Chief Officer agreed to provide the Committee with an overview from the IT team who were leading on this.

Mrs. Rebecca Stark thanked officers for the report. She commented on the support provided to children with additional learning needs and praised the way in which

schools had adapted and engaged with the children. She raised concern around the transition of year 6 pupils into year 7 and also difficulties in engaging with lower ability groups with a disparity between disadvantaged learners, and asked if it was possible to monitor these children to ensure that they did not fall behind in their learning and assess the impact the emergency situation had had on pupils. She suggested that this could be reported back to the Committee in the future. The Chief Officer advised that ensuring children did not fall behind had been acknowledged by WG who had allocated a significant amount of funding, delegated to schools to enable them to recruit additional support staff and to provide recovery programmes for learners. Colleagues from GwE would be overseeing the recovery plans.

Mr Hytch suggested that the thanks of the Committee be passed to all Headteachers and School Support staff for their hard work and dedication during the emergency situation to the benefit of learners. This suggestion was supported by the Committee.

The recommendations outlined within the report were moved by Councillor Paul Cunningham and seconded by Councillor Bob Connah

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee acknowledges the strong partnership working between Flintshire Schools and GwE which has established successful approaches to blended learning for the benefit of learners during the pandemic;
- (b) That the Committee is assured of the quality of blended learning in Flintshire Schools to date and notes the positive impact on the professional development of the schools' workforce to meet this new approach to teaching and learning and commends members of the workforce in meeting the challenges;
- (c) That the Committee welcomes the significant investment by Welsh Government in schools' digital infrastructure but acknowledges this is an area of ever increasing demand to ensure the effective delivery of blended learning moving forward; and
- (d) That the Chairman writes to schools' on behalf of the Committee to thank them for their work and dedication throughout the emergency situation to the benefit of learners

25. ADULT COMMUNITY LEARNING

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) introduced a report to provide the Committee with an overview of how Adult Community Learning (ACL) funding was changing in Flintshire. The report also sought approval to proceed with the formation of a joint Flintshire and Wrexham Adult Community Learning Partnership, which would provide oversight and management of (ACL) across both Council areas.

Flintshire County Council had responsibility for providing oversight of ACL in Flintshire for administering the Community Learning Grant (CLG) and for ensuring that partners effectively collaborate to deliver high quality provision for learners. The new guidance for the delivery of ACL provision for 2020/21 onwards required a Delivery Plan which outlined all planned CLG funded delivery from 1 September 2020. WG had worked with Councils during the transition period, taking into account the introduction of the new funding model and also the considerable challenges presented by the emergency situation.

The Chief Officer reported that Flintshire and Wrexham Councils had operated separate partnerships due to the significant difference to its funding allocations from the WG CLG. The changes to funding would provide the opportunity to combine both partnerships, which were in the main, made up of the same delivery partners. The proposals was to form a joint partnership from 1 April 2021 which would provide oversight of quality, curriculum, safeguarding, self-evaluation and outcomes for learners. WG were supportive of the proposal to combine both partnerships and this would enable more effective strategic and operational decision making whilst also maximising the funding for each area.

Mr. David Hytch asked for information on what the criteria was to access ACL and also whether this was tied to the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Act and the requirement to assist people up to the age of 25. The Chief Officer advised that the ACL was not specifically tied to the ALN Act and that grant funding had been in place for some time but Flintshire in the past had not been a positive beneficiary. There would be the opportunity to look at resources to support a significant number of learners and the co-location of the Pupil Referral Unit was especially beneficial for many of the learners with the enhancement of the provision available. It would accommodate those learners with additional learning needs and also provide a link to the Deeside Community Trust to support adults with their English and Digital Literacy skills. WG had provided a specific remit for the use of the funding but the impact on the community would be significant. It was agreed that information on what the criteria was to access Adult Community Learning would be provided to the Committee following the meeting.

The Chair spoke of previous wide ranging courses available within the community which had been popular with older people, and once the funding had changed there seemed to be a focus on basic skills which had narrowed the opportunities. Whilst he welcomed the additional funding and the partnership with Wrexham Council but felt that from a community perspective courses should be available which would benefit people within the community, especially when coming out of the emergency situation. The Chief Officer advised of the opportunities available but explained that there were conditions attached to the increased funding. By working in partnership with the Deeside Trust and blending streams together there would be the opportunity to offer a wide variety of courses that all members of the community could access. The Committee could receive regular updates on its delivery.

The recommendations outlined within the report were moved by Councillor Andy Dunbobbin and seconded by Councillor Janet Axworthy.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee note the Adult Community Learning funding within Flintshire and acknowledge the increased funding allocation through the Community Learning Grant (CLG) by Welsh Government;
- (b) That the Committee note the development work with Wrexham Adult Learning Partnership and give approval for Flintshire to proceed with forming a joint Flintshire and Wrexham Adult Community Learning Partnership.

26. RECOVERY STRATEGY UPDATE

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) introduced the update on the risk register and risk mitigation actions, shown at Appendix 1 and 2 of the report.

The Chief Officer provided an update on the recovery objectives for the service portfolio, as detailed within the report. She confirmed that key services were continuing to support schools working within the risk assessments and provided an update on the Joint Archives Service and update on the online archive.

Mr David Hytch commented on the access to Governors Cymru advisory service for all schools which was invaluable and appreciated with advice readily available.

This recommendation outlined within the report was moved by Councillor Paul Cunningham and seconded by Councillor Ian Smith.

RESOLVED:

That the updated Risk Register and Risk Mitigation Actions, as outlined within the report, be noted.

27. MID-YEAR PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR RECOVERY, PORTFOLIO AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) introduced a report to present a summary of performance at the mid-year point relevant to the Committee. The report was an exception based report and therefore focused on the areas of under-performance.

The Chief Officer drew the Committees attention to the Youth Justice Service which had faced significant challenges during the emergency situation and had risen to the challenge in funding creative ways in engaging with young people. She also

reported that the Education Co-ordinator post had been filled and this would provide greater capacity to work with young people in funding appropriate pathways to education and work.

In response to a question from Councillor Dave Mackie around the number of childcare providers, the Chief Officer provided an assurance around the number of childcare providers in Flintshire and outlined the grant scheme provided by Welsh Government and administered by the Council to childcare providers during the emergency situation.

This recommendation outlined within the report was moved by Councillor Andy Dunbobbin and seconded by Mrs Lynn Bartlett.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

28. 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 items by virtue of exempt information under paragraph(s) 15 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

29. AURA: BUSINESS RECOVERY PLAN

The Managing Director of Aura provided a detailed presentation which covered the following areas:-

- Recovery Plan: Phase 1
 - Mitigation of Costs
- Recovery Plan: Phase 2
 - Re-opening of Libraries
 - Re-opening of Leisure Centres
 - Aura Employees
 - Employee Survey
 - Prepare for the 'New Normal'
- Financial Impact of Covid-19

Councillor Dave Mackie praised the way in which Aura had adapted during the emergency situation and felt confident that members of the public would feel safe returning to Deeside Leisure Centre when possible, due to the measures being taken by all staff to ensure their safety.

In response to a question around the cost to re-develop Deeside Leisure Centre, the Managing Director confirmed that the costs were unknown at this stage as they could not access the site whilst it was being used as a community hospital.

In response to comments made by Councillor Tudor Jones, the Managing Director agreed that continued additional financial support would be required from the Welsh Government.

Councillor Janet Axworthy suggested that a letter be sent to AURA colleagues by the Chairman on behalf of the Committee, thanking them for their work, dedication and initiative throughout the emergency situation. This suggestion was supported by the Committee.

The recommendations outlined within the report were moved by Councillor Dave Mackie and seconded by Councillor Ian Smith.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee note the trading and operational challenges presented by Covid-19 and the challenges presented in relation to the continuation of the current level of service delivery post March 2021; and
- (b) That the Chairman writes to AURA colleagues on behalf of the Committee to thank them for their work, dedication and initiative throughout the emergency situation.

29. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2pm and ended at 4.12 pm)

.....
Chairman