

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1 JULY 2021

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Education, Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Thursday 1st July 2021.

PRESENT: Councillor David Healey (Chair)

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

CO-OPTED MEMBER:

Lynn Bartlett

APOLOGIES: Councillor Tudor Jones, Mrs Wendy White and the Chief Officer (Education & Youth)

SUBSTITUTION: Councillor Patrick Heesom (for Councillor David Williams)

CONTRIBUTORS:

Councillor Ian Roberts, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education and Senior Manager for School Improvement

Mr. Martyn Froggett, Secondary Core Lead for Flintshire, Mr. David Edwards, Primary Core Lead for Flintshire (For agenda item 5)

Learning Advisor (Health Wellbeing & Safeguarding) (For agenda item 6)

Strategic Policy Advisor and Benefits Manager (For agenda item 7)

Senior Manager (Business Change and Support) (For agenda item 8)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Education Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator, Democratic Services Officer and Democratic Services Support Officer

06 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None.

07 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 18 March and 14 June 2021 were received.

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2021 were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillor Dave Mackie and Councillor Paul Cunningham.

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2021 were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey and Councillor Paul Cunningham.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

08 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented the report and confirmed that all future committee dates had been included in the Forward Work Programme for the Committee following the AGM in May. The regular reports together with an additional item for September on the Archive Service had been added and she confirmed that the Forward Work Programme would be populated prior to the September meeting. An item on Home Schooling, as suggested by Councillor Gladys Healey, would also be included and said if members wished to add any additional items on the Forward Work Programme they could do so by contacting her. All actions on the Action Tracking report had been completed

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey and Councillor Bob Connah.

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.

09 ANNUAL REPORT FROM REGIONAL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT SERVICE, GWE

The Senior Manager for School Improvement introduced the report which provided an overview of the support afforded by the Regional School Improvement Service (GwE) and their annual report on the work across North Wales. She referenced the work carried out during the pandemic which included remote and blended learning, support and guidance to schools and also the national reform and new curriculum and thanked them for the dedicated support that they had provided to Flintshire schools.

The report and presentation were provided by Mr. Martyn Froggett, Secondary Core Lead for Flintshire, Mr. David Edwards, Primary Core Lead for Flintshire from the Regional School Improvement Services (GwE) and included an update on the support provided and its impact on schools.

The presentation contained detailed information on:-

- The general support provided for schools and the local authority since January
- Support provided to schools following the Estyn Recommendations on completion of the thematic review
- Planning and support for schools for Curriculum for Wales in September

Councillor Mackie thanked officers for the report. He commented on the content of the report and information, such as, the number of school visits but asked for information on the purposes for the visits. He also asked for generalised feedback from people who had taken courses, information on professional learning and the number of Flintshire officers taking part with their feedback and comparisons with other authorities in North Wales to see how Flintshire's professional training programme was developing.

In response, the Senior Manager said that this was the North Wales Annual Report from GwE and agreed some elements of the report had been to committee previously but that the slides provided positive information on the more recent situation in schools. As all performance measures, national reporting and examination system results had been suspended and the focus was on support to ensure that provision was in place.

The Secondary Core Lead understood the comments made by Councillor Mackie but said that the usual data was not available to present and that well-being had been at the heart of their approach to schools. He confirmed data was available on the uptake of the courses provided and what was happening in Flintshire. He agreed that moving forward to include this information in the reports from a Flintshire and comparative basis and added information on the participation of the Curriculum for Wales' workshops would be available soon and could also be included. The Primary Core Lead agreed with the comments made and said the robust data was missing at the moment because of the pandemic but that this would be included when more firmer data was available. He reported on the new admin role for leadership programmes who would dis-aggregate the data for each Local Authority to enable this to be presented to committee. Support had been provided to Head Teachers around self-evaluation reports as Schools had been working under so much pressure with Head Teachers not having the time to reflect on the positives and areas for improvement.

The Chair praised the efficient way in which GwE had rolled out support for schools and said that he was pleased to see positive changes in education with well-being at the core, which he felt was important to ensure schools got the right support.

Councillor Gladys Healey asked if there was information available on how many Head Teachers and teaching staff had contracted Covid and were also suffering with Long Covid as North Wales did not have a Long Covid clinic. The situation in schools was unpredictable and Councillor Healey felt that all pupils should be vaccinated to enable them to return to the classroom.

In response, the Leader of the Council said that this was a matter for the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). He confirmed that Head Teachers, GwE and the Council had fully supported schools and that the rise in cases was probably as a result of events happening outside of school. He praised the way GwE and Flintshire officers had supported schools throughout the pandemic which had enabled them to continue to perform to a high standard.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved and seconded by Councillor Martin White and Councillor Ian Smith.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee accept the Annual Report from GwE; and
- (b) That the positive impact on the regional service in supporting Flintshire schools during the pandemic and in their ongoing preparations for the implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales be noted.

10 SOCIAL MEDIA AND INTERNET SAFETY

The report was presented by the Senior Manager for School Improvement and Learning Advisor (Health Wellbeing & Safeguarding) and provided Members with an update on the Portfolio's Social Media and Internet Safety policy with the focus on Safety and Well Being of learners. Technology had enabled education to continue during the pandemic which, whilst being a huge benefit, there has also been harmful behaviour online and content which would put learners at risk if appropriate strategies were not in place. She confirmed that this responsibility was taken seriously by the Authority and schools.

The Learning Advisor (Health Well-being and Safeguarding) presented the report which had been brought to reassure committee that children and young people were receiving appropriate levels of support in relation to social media and internet safety with the report highlighting what the authority had undertaken together with the national guidance. Social media platforms had enabled schools and the authority to communicate quickly with children and parents but there were advantages and disadvantages with the same challenges faced by adults using these platforms as young people. The report contained data and guidance provided by UK Government and Welsh Government (WG) which was now being followed locally. Information on the Digital Competency Framework, Schools Health Research Network (SHRN) was provided and it was confirmed that the next survey would take place in the Autumn this year.

The Learning Advisor drew Members attention to the Online Safety Bill, Action Plan, Guidance and Curriculum for Wales. Information on the remit of the All Wales School Liaison Core Programme was outlined together with the programme "Getting on Together" which looked at challenging extremism. In conclusion, she outlined the new Estyn Inspection Framework with a pilot for this commencing in spring 2022.

Councillor Mackie welcomed the report and the inclusion of links which provided accompanying online documentation for Members to view. He asked as a school governor what questions should he be asking of his schools and were the schools aware of the report.

In response, the Learning Advisor explained that the authority had a duty to provide appropriate training and advice and that this was already in the portfolio's forward ward programme. She added that it was hoped that the Trainer who had

provided training for the schools programme could hold a session for school governors who would be given questions to ask their governing body.

Councillor Martin White referred to point 1.08 where it stated 68 out of 78 schools had registered for 360 Degree Safe Cymru and asked what could be done to encourage the final 10 to register. In response the Senior Manager said that this was an important tool but said schools could be using other tools which were available but agreed it would be beneficial if all schools could register. This would be encouraged in the new academic year.

The Chair commented on the pupil to pupil cyber bullying figures which were down to 20% of learners reporting this compared to 23% when surveyed in 2017, but said that this remained higher than the average of 18%. He referred to the Notice of Motion which went to Council in 2019, where all Members signed up to a pledge that they would not themselves engage in social media in ways which denigrates other individuals. He asked how Members could re-affirm this pledge.

The Learning Advisor supported the Chair's comments and suggested that this and online bullying could be promoted to form part of the new academic year and included in schools newsletters, twitter, websites etc. The authority's communication team could promote this further to make a stance on cyber bullying which was very important. This suggestion was supported by the Committee.

Councillor Axworthy paid tribute to the late Councillor Kevin Hughes' championing of stopping cyber bullying. She commented that this was a hugely important subject and she welcomed the upcoming governor training and steps to move this forward.

Councillor Gladys Healey asked if primary schools could be included as well as high schools as younger children had their own phones and used social media. Councillor Healey felt that if they were taught at a very young age to respect each other and follow the no bullying policy by the time they reached secondary schools this would assist in reducing the issue.

In response, the Learner Advisor confirmed that the survey was currently only carried out in secondary schools but a pilot was being undertaken with some year 6 pupils. The primary school pilot had been delayed due to the pandemic with no timeframe set for this at present but the key messages on online safety were taught in the curriculum from foundation phase.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved and seconded by Councillor Janet Axworthy and Councillor Sian Braun.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee feel assured around the level of assurance about the education offer to schools in relation to online safety, including social media.

11 COMMENCEMENT OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

The Strategic Policy Advisor and Benefits Manager introduced a report on the Council's preparations for the commencement of the socio-economic duty. This was a statutory requirement upon relevant public bodies to have due regard to the need to reduce inequalities of outcomes resulting from socio-economic disadvantage.

The Strategic Policy Advisor and Benefits Manager gave a joint presentation covering the following:

- What is the Socio-economic Duty and what does it do?
- Key terms
- Inequalities of outcomes
- Examples of poverty
- Demonstrating due regard - audit trail
- Meeting the duty - what we are doing
- Better outcomes
- Case study

The presentation highlighted the broader examples of poverty which linked to one of the priorities within the Council Plan. The report was being shared with all Overview & Scrutiny Committees to raise awareness of the new obligations. Amongst the actions, the inclusion of Integrated Impact Assessment outcomes on committee reports would help to demonstrate consideration of potential impacts of poverty in strategic decision-making.

The Chair referred to the Education portfolio and the food poverty aspect with the provision of free school meals helping to address this. In recent times digital poverty had been highlighted with remote and blended learning with the provision of devices to ensure these children were able to carry on learning. He asked if there were other ways education and schools could assist with aspects of poverty. In response the Strategic Policy Advisor said that when building new schools or planning new strategies, consideration should be given to the poverty aspect and the children and families affected. Also ensuring all information was provided to enable families to obtain the support and benefits they were entitled to.

The Senior Manager added that poverty was high on the agenda for the Education portfolio with the Chief Officer leading on that work. Schools were already looking at the needs of their learners and families and providing support. She reported that digital inclusion was forming part of the Digital Strategy moving forward with the new theme of Learning and Culture to bring that forward. The Education portfolio welcomed the framework to open the debate more widely to support the needs of learners and families.

Councillor Cunningham thanked the officers for the presentation and commented that poverty had been exacerbated due to the pandemic. He said that poverty affected a range of people and it was pleasing to hear that the Council was doing all it could to alleviate that.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved and seconded by Mrs Lynne Bartlett and Councillor Paul Cunningham.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the requirements of the Socio-economic Duty be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee is assured of the Council's preparedness in meeting the new duty

12 END OF YEAR PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Senior Manager (Business Change and Support) introduced the report which provided an overview of the levels of progress in the achievement of activities, performance levels and current risk levels as identified in the Council Plan. The key performance targets for attendance, exclusions or not in education or employment for the last council year had been unable to be collected due to schools being closed. The Senior Manager was pleased to highlight the three performance targets which had moved to green and yellow which included the youth justice system which had met a reduction for first time entrance into the youth justice system.

The Senior Manager (Business Change and Support) referred to Councillor Mackie's earlier comments around support for school governors and advised that information on safeguarding, access to 360 training and questions that governors could ask were available through Governors Cymru which schools could access. She suggested that this be included as an action from the meeting to remind governors that they had access to this very helpful resource website.

Councillor Mackie referred to the exceptions reporting format which was clear and easy to read especially the notes at the bottom and welcomed the ability for Members to fully understand the data that was being presented.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved and seconded by Councillors Gladys Healey and Ian Smith.

RESOLVED:

That the End of Year Performance Monitoring Report be noted.

13 MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.16 pm)

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Chairman