

# Education & Youth Portfolio

## Self-Evaluation Report of Education Services

April 2021- March 2022



## Introduction & Local Context – Flintshire County Council

Formed in 1996 following local government reorganisation, Flintshire is a well governed and high performing unitary local authority in the north east corner of Wales bordering Cheshire, Wrexham and Denbighshire. Flintshire has a strong track record of being a direct provider of local services from Education, Social Care, Streetscene and Housing. Whilst direct provision is at the core of its model, Flintshire is also a creative and flexible council and operates both as a provider and a commissioner of services. It has been instrumental in developing collaborative arrangements such as a regional school improvement service, an employee-owned mutual in leisure, libraries and cultural services, catering and cleaning services and a local social housing trading company. Continuing to develop sustainable models of delivery and maintaining high quality services continues to be a priority for the Council, particularly in challenging financial times, in order to secure the best outcomes for its residents and value for money for the public purse.

Flintshire provides local public services for 156,847 people (2020) who live in 66,973 households.<sup>1</sup> It has the largest population of the North Wales authorities and is the sixth largest in Wales. The population is expected to rise by 2.1% by 2028 but this reflects more of an increase in the number of people over the age of 65 as the numbers of children, young people and the working population are predicted to decrease. This will obviously impact on future demands for services in different ways.

With 6,072 staff, the Council is one of the two largest employers in the county, alongside Airbus, and provides direct services including, education, housing, planning, refuse collection, environmental health, recycling, roads, social services, trading standards, transport and tourism. It provides leisure, library and catering/cleaning services via 'arms' length' trading companies. Flintshire has seven libraries, ten sports and leisure centres, two country parks and maintains 733 miles of roads. Flintshire has 78 schools (64 Primary, 11 Secondary, 2 Specialist & 1 PRU) providing education for 23,347 pupils, including those educated other than at school. Approximately 13.28% of the total population are of school age.

Manufacturing, retail trade and human health and social work are the sectors which currently employ the most people in Flintshire. The availability of employment is rising and unemployment in Flintshire at October 2021 stood at 3.9%. The COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit will, however, have implications for the local economy and the population in the short, medium and long term. The North Wales Economic Framework, supported by UK, Welsh Government and Local Government funding streams provides a clear strategy for future economic growth and clearly articulates the skills and knowledge that will be needed within the local and regional population to deliver on emerging economic, social, digital, and wellbeing priorities.

The County has a mix of affluent and deprived areas. Due to the interconnections of factors there are particular communities that are more vulnerable than others in Flintshire. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2019 highlights that coastal communities in Flintshire experience high levels of deprivation (3.3% of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) in 10% most deprived; 10.9% in 20% most deprived in Wales), particularly when it comes to the employment, income, education, and community safety dimensions.

The number of school aged pupils entitled to Free School Meals (e-FSM) has increased from 13.47% in 2019 (Wales 2019 average 15.96%) to 20.41% in 2022. This figure is now much closer to the current Welsh average of 20.52%.

Based on the 2021 Annual Population Survey, the Welsh language is spoken by 23.9% of the population in Flintshire compared to 29.5% across Wales. This is a significant increase on the data

---

<sup>1</sup> StatsWales

from the 2011 national census which reported 13.2% of the county's population having some Welsh language skills. The county has 5 Welsh medium primary schools and 1 Welsh medium secondary school. There are no dual stream or bilingual schools in Flintshire. Currently 6.23% of children in Flintshire are educated through the medium of Welsh. There are ambitious targets in the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan to more than double this number over the next ten years.

The county also has a mixed provision of faith based education with 7 Church in Wales Voluntary Aided primary schools, 5 Roman Catholic primary schools and 1 Roman Catholic secondary school. 11.02% of children in Flintshire currently receive their education in a faith based setting.

Flintshire has a strong tradition of supporting a local infrastructure of non-maintained early years' provision through both English and Welsh, which supports the Council in its delivery of childcare and early years' education. Flintshire was an early adopter of the Welsh Government's flagship childcare policy of 30 hours free provision for working parents and there is a strong network of childminders, playgroups and private day nurseries delivering this combination of childcare and early education prior to children transitioning into schools. Flintshire Council also supports neighbouring local authorities with the administration of their Childcare Offer.

Overall, 13.77% of school aged pupils in Flintshire are designated as having a Special Educational Need in 2022. Of this number 3.14% have Statement of Special Educational Need, higher than the Welsh average of 1.73%. 7.02% of pupils are designated as School Action which is lower than the Welsh average of 11.22% and 3.6% are at School Action Plus, lower than the Welsh average of 7.87%.

The current Chief Executive, Neal Cockerton, was appointed in November 2021 and was previously a member of the Council's Chief Officer Team. The Chief Officer for Education and Youth, Claire Homard, was appointed in June 2017, initially as Interim Chief Officer and then permanently in 2018. She is also fulfils the role as Statutory Director of Education for the Council. The Leader of the Council, Cllr Ian Roberts, is also the Cabinet Member for Education. Following the Council elections of May 2022, the newly appointed Chair of the Education, Youth & Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee is Cllr Teresa Carberry.

The Council's Education Services were last inspected by Estyn in June 2019 under the Local Government Education Services Framework. The outcome was a positive report and no requirement for any kind of follow up. The recommendations from the report were as follows and are embedded in business plans for the Council and the Education & Youth Portfolio:

R1 Improve outcomes for learners in key stage 4

R2 Reduce exclusions and increase attendance in both primary and secondary schools

R3 Improve the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the few front line education services identified in the report in order to provide more accurate information about the impact of the local authority's work

R4 Manage the reduction in school budget deficits more effectively

### **Structure of the Council**

Flintshire County Council has 67 Councillors that are normally democratically elected every 4 years. After the elections of May 2022 there is a minority Labour administration with informal support from the Liberal Democrats. The political make up of Flintshire County Council elected members from May 22 is as follows:

Labour: 31 Independents: 22 Flintshire Independents: 4 Liberal Democrats: 4 Eagle Group: 3  
Conservative: 2 Non-Aligned: 1

The Council has a Cabinet and a Scrutiny function. Decisions are usually made by the Cabinet for all issues including major policy matters. The role of Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to hold the Cabinet to account and to assist in the improvement and development of the Council's policies and services. Flintshire has 5 Overview and Scrutiny Committees covering:

- Education, Youth & Culture
- Corporate Management & Governance
- Community, Housing & Assets
- Environment & Economy
- Social and Health Care



Leader of the Council  
Cllr Ian Roberts



Chief Executive  
Neal Cockerton



Chief Officer Education & Youth  
Claire Homard

### **Working in Partnership**

Flintshire County Council has a longstanding and proud track record of partnership working. The communities it serves rightly expect statutory and third sector partners to work together to manage shared priorities through collaboration. The Flintshire Public Services Board (PSB) is at the heart of promoting a positive culture of working together and concentrates energy, effort and resources on providing efficient and effective services to local communities. It works within the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and its sustainable development principles.

In addition, Flintshire also has joint Public Service Board with Wrexham County Borough Council as it was acknowledged that by joining together, knowledge and resources could be shared and joint solutions found to tackle common challenges, specifically those around community resilience and COVID-19 recovery. This Joint PSB was formed in June 2020. Those priorities marked with \* are the priorities of the Joint PSB. The priorities of the Public Service Board are:

- Community Safety
- Healthy and Independent Living
- Community Resilience : Children and Young People\*
- Community Resilience : Environment and Carbon Reduction\*
- Community Resilience : Mental Health and Well-being\*
- Community Resilience : Poverty and Inequality\*

Public Services Board partners include: Wrexham County Borough Council, Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, Public Health Wales, North Wales Police, North Wales Fire and Rescue Service, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, HM Prison and Probation Service in Wales,

Flintshire Local Voluntary Council, Association of Voluntary Organisations in Wrexham, Coleg Cambria, Wrexham Glyndwr University, Do Well Ltd, NE Wales MIND and the Department for Work & Pensions.

### **Flintshire's Corporate Plan 2021-22**

The Council Improvement Plan is reviewed and refreshed each year and approved by full Council. In the period 2021-2022 the following core improvement themes drove the business plans of each portfolio and were reported on via quarterly monitoring reports, culminating in an Annual Performance Report.

<b>Theme / Wellbeing Objective</b>	<b>In-year Priority</b>
<b>Poverty</b>  Protecting people from poverty by supporting them to meet their basic needs	Income Poverty
	Child Poverty
	Food Poverty
	Fuel Poverty
	Digital Poverty
<b>Affordable and Accessible Housing</b>  Housing in Flintshire meeting the needs of our residents and supporting safer communities	Housing support and homeless prevention
	Housing Needs and Housing Options
	Social Housing
	Private Rented Sector
	Empty Properties
<b>Green Society and Environment</b>  Limiting the impact of the Council's services on the natural environment and supporting the wider communities of Flintshire to reduce their own carbon footprint.	Carbon Neutrality
	Fleet Strategy
	Green Environment
	Renewable Energy
	Active and Sustainable Travel Options
<b>Economy</b>  Enabling a sustainable economic recovery	Town Centre Regeneration
	Business
	Transport and digital infrastructure
	Local Development Plan (LDP) Targets
	Spending money for the benefit of Flintshire
<b>Personal and Community Well-being</b>  Supporting people in need to live as well as they can	Reducing worklessness
	Independent Living
	Safeguarding
	Direct Provision to support people closer to home
	Local Dementia Strategy
<b>Education &amp; Skills</b>  Enabling and Supporting Learning Communities	A well-connected, safe and clean local environment.
	Educational Engagement and Achievement
	Digital Learning Opportunities
	Learning Environments
	Learning Community Networks
Specialist Educational Provision	

The themes for the Education & Youth Portfolio were incorporated into the E&Y Business Plan 2021-22 and progress was regularly reported to Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

# Self-Evaluation of Education Services

## **INSPECTION AREA 1: OUTCOMES**

### **1:1 Standards and progress overall**

Estyn suspended inspections of all education providers maintained by local authorities in March 2020 due to COVID-19 and no further inspections were carried out in 2019- 2020 or 2020-2021. Inspections in the non- maintained settings began again in spring term 2022 as well as pilot inspections for schools. Inspections in the school sector began again in summer term 2022 and two Flintshire primary schools were inspected under the revised inspection framework.

Inspection performance across the school sectors is strong. There are no schools in Estyn follow up or statutory category at the current time. There is a strong record of close correlation between the Council's pre-inspection reports and Estyn findings. The Council has a very good track record in effectively supporting schools being removed from categories. Powers of intervention are used effectively where schools cause concern, to ensure challenge and support is timely and effective. Interim Executive Boards have provided successful challenge and intervention to schools in serious categories of concern. This has helped to increase the pace of change and ensure robust accountability for standards and progress.

The primary school inspection profile for Flintshire has been continuously strong. Between September 2017 and March 2020, 24 primary schools in Flintshire were inspected. 96% of the schools inspected were at least Good for standard of care, support and guidance for pupils, with 29% judged to be Excellent. Nearly all primary schools inspected also effectively promote pupil wellbeing and positive attitudes to learning (92% judged to be Excellent or Good). Standards of Teaching and Learning were judged to be Excellent or Good in 88% of these schools. One primary school was placed in Special Measures in December 2019. Following a comprehensive package of support provided by the LA and GwE, the school was removed from follow up in spring 2022. Two primary schools placed in Estyn review in autumn term 2018 have both been removed from follow up. During the summer term 2022, two Flintshire primary schools were inspected under the new inspection arrangements. Judgements are no longer given by Estyn for the 5 inspection areas. Both schools have no follow up requirements by Estyn as a result of their inspection and one school has been invited to prepare a case study on its work in relation to ensuring rapid progress for pupils following the disruption caused by the pandemic.

Overall, the inspection profile for Flintshire secondary schools is strong. No secondary schools are in any Estyn follow up category. The two schools that were in Estyn Review were successfully removed from follow up in 2022. All secondary schools have bespoke support plans in place to ensure continued improvement. Schools causing concern are subject to robust monitoring. There are 360° action plans in place when needed and highly focused support provided by both the Regional School Improvement Service, GwE and the Local Authority.

### **1.2 Standards and Progress of Specific Groups**

#### **Early Education Funded Provision for 3 year olds (Early Entitlement)**

Over the last three years Flintshire has averaged 485 three year olds per month accessing early education, known locally as Early Entitlement (EE) through a mixed provision of mostly playgroups and

private day nurseries. During the 2020/21 financial year significantly less children accessed provision due to the pandemic. Some schools offer early education as part of their nursery/reception class if there is a lack of non-maintained provision in the area. Pupil level data on standards achieved by three year olds is not collected by the Local Authority. Quality of provision in the non-maintained sector is monitored regularly by the Early Entitlement Advisory Team (EET) and a number of partner schools and is quality assured by Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). The Local Authority uses Estyn inspections as the main source of data on standards and progress in funded non-maintained settings alongside professional observations from the Early Entitlement Advisory Team.

Early Entitlement provision has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic over the last two years. In summer 2020, in line with Welsh Government (WG) legislation, the EE scheme was suspended and all EE registered playgroups and a third of private day nurseries closed. No summer eligible EE children were registered with the scheme. Spring funded EE children had their places withdrawn. Some non-maintained settings did reopen but only for the provision of childcare for essential workers and for vulnerable children as directed by Welsh Government.

In response to the closure of settings and the focus on 'home learning', the Early Entitlement Team (EET) created a new Facebook page and used it to bilingually share a learning activity suitable for 3 year olds each day. Parents of spring funded EE children were invited to view the EET's activity ideas directly or through 'Home Learning' sites set up by the child's setting. The response to the Facebook page was very positive with setting staff and parents signing up in good numbers.

Between September and December 2020 registered EE providers were open but were operating under challenging and restrictive conditions and worked hard to remain open despite staff absences. No 'in person' visits were made by the EET to settings during this time because settings have no funded EE children during the autumn term and many settings' risk assessments didn't include EET members as 'essential visitors' at that time.

Overall, the inspection profile for Flintshire non maintained settings is strong. Over recent years there have been mostly positive outcomes from Estyn inspections of non-maintained settings funded to deliver Foundation Phase education to eligible 3 year-olds. The turnover of staff in the non-maintained sector can make securing consistency of standards and provision challenging and the Early Entitlement Team often find themselves having to train staff with no prior knowledge about how to meet the additional demands of educational provision rather than childcare.

A very small number of settings have been placed in Estyn Review or Focused Improvement over the last five years and the LA has a positive track record in supporting these settings to be removed quickly.

Estyn suspended inspections of all education providers maintained by local authorities in March 2020 due to COVID-19 and no further inspections were carried out in 2019-2020 or 2020-2021. Inspections in the non-maintained settings began again in spring term 2022. One setting was placed in Focused Improvement in spring 2022. One setting was removed from Progress review in summer term 2022. There are no other settings in any level of follow up.

The Advisory Teachers' reports clearly identify a setting's strengths as well as areas for development. Teachers have undertaken this task with integrity and objectivity and the correlation between their judgement in the reports and the final inspection outcomes match closely. No concerns have been raised by the Inspectors undertaking an individual visit or through the Local Area Inspection visits to the local authority that these reports are not accurately reflecting the standards and quality of provision in the non-maintained settings

### **1.3 Wellbeing and attitudes to learning**

Of the 24 primary schools inspected between September 2017 and March 2020, 92% of the schools inspected were at least Good for wellbeing and attitudes to learning, with 25% judged to be Excellent. The secondary special school was also judged to be Good. The primary special school was judged to be Excellent for Care support and guidance in its last inspection. Two of the three secondary schools inspected under wellbeing and attitudes to learning were judged to be good and the third school judged to be excellent.

#### **Attendance**

The impact of the pandemic makes it difficult to draw conclusions on pupil attendance and the impact of the training which has been offered to support emotional health and wellbeing. (See Inspection Area 2). The data below indicates a dip in the attendance across both sectors, but noticeably in the secondary sector with 64% of secondary schools dipping below 90% compared with none in the two years prior to the pandemic. The impact of COVID-19 was more evident across the secondary sector and appeared to be the result of community transmission.

In line with Welsh Government directives, the Council suspended the use of tools such as Fixed Penalty Notices in favour of wellbeing visits/contact from the Education Welfare Service (EWS). There is no national data available to see how Flintshire compares with other LAs at this point in time. Targeted attendance reviews by the EWS are underway and these form part of the revised monitoring system that is being implemented. Illness remains the main reason for absence. Levels of unauthorised absence remain low prior to 2020 but have seen a rise, particularly in the secondary sector.

*Table 1: Flintshire Schools' Attendance in comparison with Welsh Averages*

	Attendance (%)				Unauthorised absence (%)			
	2020/21 *	2019/20 *	2018/19	2017/18	2020/21 *	2019/20 *	2018/19	2017/18
<b>FCC Primary Schools</b>	<b>92.7</b>	-	<b>94.6</b>	<b>94.6</b>	<b>0.9</b>	-	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.5</b>
<b>Wales Average</b>	-	-	95.4	95.2	-	-	0.3	0.3
<b>Best in Wales</b>	-	-	94.6	94.5	-	-	1.4	1.3
<b>FCC Secondary Schools</b>	<b>88.8</b>	-	<b>93.3</b>	<b>93.7</b>	<b>2.6</b>	-	<b>1.2</b>	<b>0.9</b>
<b>Wales Average</b>	-	-	94.8	94.4	-	-	0.7	0.6
<b>Best in Wales</b>	-	-	95.0	94.8	-	-	1.7	1.6

\* not published data

*Table 2: Spread of attendance figures*

Attendance (%)	<90	90.0-90.9	91.0-91.9	92.0-92.9	93.0-93.9	94.0-94.9	95.0-95.9	96.0-96.9	97.0-97.9	98.0-98.9	99.0-100
Primary 2020/21	7	5	6	7	11	15	6	7	0	0	0
Primary 2019/20	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

Primary 2018/19	1	0	1	4	9	20	21	7	1	0	0
Primary 2017/18	1	0	0	6	7	21	23	5	1	0	0
<b>Attendance (%)</b>	<b>&lt;90</b>	<b>90.0-90.9</b>	<b>91.0-91.9</b>	<b>92.0-92.9</b>	<b>93.0-93.9</b>	<b>94.0-94.9</b>	<b>95.0-95.9</b>	<b>96.0-96.9</b>	<b>97.0-97.9</b>	<b>98.0-98.9</b>	<b>99.0-100</b>
Secondary 2020/21	7	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Secondary 2019/20	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Secondary 2018/19	0	0	2	3	2	4	0	0	0	0	0
Secondary 2017/18	0	0	2	1	2	5	1	0	0	0	0

### Exclusions – Permanent and Fixed Term

A reduction in the level of permanent exclusion remains a priority for the Council as it is a recommendation from the LGES Inspection of 2019. Significant work has been undertaken internally with regard to central services to review practice and particularly the use of data to support effective tracking and intervention. The Senior Learning Adviser – Engagement has worked directly with schools and other services in relation to permanent exclusion to identify appropriate support and intervention to help prevent this. The data below does suggest a downward trend over the last three years however, the potential impact of the pandemic on the educational offer makes direct comparisons with previous years problematic.

Table 3: Number of Permanent Exclusions from Flintshire Schools

	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19
<b>Flintshire</b>	9*	19	26
<b>Wales</b>	*	234	249

\* not published data

The level of fixed-term exclusion also suggests a decreasing trend but still remains notably above the Welsh average for incidents of 5 days or less, whilst the rates of 5 days or more has remained below the Welsh average for the published data. Levels of exclusion remain significantly higher in the secondary sector with disruptive behaviour, assault/violence to a pupil and verbal abuse towards an adult being the predominant reasons for exclusion. Schools have reported an impact of the pandemic on their school communities with regards to behaviour, with the availability of wider pastoral provision being reduced as a result of the physical restrictions and staff absence due to COVID-19. A half-termly monitoring process has been introduced to further target individuals/schools for support.

Table 4: Fixed-Term Exclusions

Year	Exclusion Type	Number of Exclusions	Rate of Exclusion (per 1000 pupils)
<b>2020/21*</b>	<b>5 Days or Less</b>	<b>991</b>	<b>42.78</b>
	Wales		

	<b>Over 5 days</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>1.4</b>
	Wales		
<b>2019/20</b>	<b>5 Days or Less</b>	<b>1069</b>	<b>45.7</b>
	Wales	13,496	28.7
	<b>Over 5 days</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>0.9</b>
	Wales	562	1.2
<b>2018/19</b>	<b>5 Days or Less</b>	<b>1347</b>	<b>61.2</b>
	Wales	19,252	41.0
	<b>Over 5 days</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>1.4</b>
	Wales	799	1.7

\*Not published data

The number of managed moves across Flintshire remains small with the majority being within the secondary sector. Approximately 35% of these prove to be successful, with the others either resulting in a return to the original school or a move to more specialist provision.

Table 5: Number of managed moves

Year	Primary	Secondary
2021/22	3	12
2020/21	1	6
2019/20	2	10

## Outcome 1: Standards and Progress Summary

### Areas for ongoing improvement & sustainability

- Maintain support for primary schools and early years settings with the implementation of the revised curriculum from September 2022
- Ensure all secondary schools are ready for the implementation of the revised curriculum in September 2023
- Improve attendance rates and reduce the number of fixed and permanent exclusions through targeted interventions and bespoke educational packages
- Maintain positive inspection outcomes across all sectors - early years, primary, secondary and specialist provision
- Continue to Improve the skills and confidence of staff and learners to raise standards in the use of the Welsh language

## **INSPECTION AREA 2 : QUALITY OF EDUCATION SERVICES**

### **2.1 Support for School Improvement**

#### **School Improvement Processes**

The Council knows its schools very well. There are clear strategies, policies and processes that are understood by those involved and give a clear shape and direction to the Education Service.

The relationship and collaboration between Flintshire and the Regional School Improvement Service (GwE) is very good and similarly, relationships between GwE and schools in Flintshire are very positive. Through this relationship, the Council has quality information about its schools and provides them with robust and appropriate challenge but also support and intervention. As a result, schools benefit from a diverse regional professional learning offer and bespoke support at individual school and cluster level. This can be evidenced by the improvement dialogue with schools and the strong inspection profile.

Improving performance in Key Stage 4 continues to be a priority following the last inspection. As a result, each secondary school has an agreed programme of support that helps deliver the identified priorities within a school's improvement plan. The school support plan clearly defines how school improvement resources ensure targeted improvements in key priority areas. Where required, schools are also supported by a 360° support plan which identifies enhanced support needs through the LA and GwE. These plans are monitored through the Council's Quality Board.

The Council, in partnership with GwE, has effective procedures to support schools in their self-evaluation and improvement planning. Schools are robustly challenged on the quality of their self-evaluation processes. The impact of this can be seen in the positive profile of Estyn inspections.

Schools make effective use of the milestones provided by GwE for the reform of the Curriculum for Wales and Additional Learning Needs. This allows schools to reflect on their current position with regards to the reform journey and provides clear next steps for their consideration. Cluster work is enhanced through collaborative work and the sharing of priorities and dialogue helps capture the level of support required by schools and collaborations of schools.

Senior leaders within the service use a range of data and intelligence effectively to ensure areas of improvement are identified quickly and addressed robustly through detailed business planning. Data and information is scrutinised more robustly to monitor progress against agreed actions. As a result, the Council is effective in challenging schools where needed and allocating specific support for those schools.

There is a comprehensive professional learning offer for all schools in Flintshire and this is enhanced by what is being offered at local level by schools and between schools. The professional learning offer supports school leadership at all levels across the county and has been strengthened by a range of strategies including access to regional and national development programmes. The local authority has supported the development of leadership in Flintshire schools on a number of levels. Subscription to the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and Aspiring Heads course is strong while existing and recently appointed headteachers are very well supported through the New and Acting headteacher programme. The impact of this has been demonstrated in the good recruitment levels at senior leadership level across Flintshire schools.

There has been a clear focus on improving teaching in Flintshire schools. Many schools have been part of teaching and learning professional learning opportunities such as the regional Shirley Clarke Assessment for Learning project. The impact of this focus can be evidenced in the evaluation of practice at school and regional level and through the continued improvement in Inspection Area 3 of the Flintshire Estyn profile (Teaching). All schools have been involved in the ongoing professional development and support programme for the implementation of the new curriculum.

Primary and Secondary networks and peer-to-peer work has strengthened collaboration and led to a stronger shared understanding of effective practice. The Secondary Alliance model is developing well and leading to improved levels of collaboration between schools in sharing practice at senior and middle leadership level and in standards of teaching and learning. The Middle Leadership professional development programmes have been successful in improving the quality of leaders in core subjects, literacy and numeracy and Foundation Phase through development of skills and knowledge. Bespoke approaches have been tailored to meet the requirements of individual schools; coaching programmes for groups and individuals have been delivered in a number of schools and had a clear impact on the work of leaders. Shortages in key personnel have also been supported through the deployment of expertise from neighbouring schools.

Collaborative practice amongst leaders is reinforced through strategic forums, at both headteacher and deputy level. The Council supports strong and effective communication and a mutual sense of common responsibility for the development of responses and actions to local and national challenges. Good practice is shared and local expertise nurtured.

Schools in Flintshire are generally well prepared for the National Reform Journey. The regional reform strategy gives clear direction on how GwE works with schools to ensure a clear and systematic approach to providing support and also opportunities to assist schools to reflect on their engagement with all aspects of the reform journey. As a result, primary schools in Flintshire are well prepared for implementing the new curriculum from September 2022. All secondary schools in Flintshire have opted to defer implementation until September 2023. Each school cluster has two designated leads to facilitate the change management process and required planning to develop the new curriculum and implement new professional standards. Flintshire schools are positively engaged with developing themselves as Schools as Learning Organisations.

Flintshire schools have made effective use of the Small and Rural Schools grant. The Council facilitated a group of small schools to work collaboratively on shared priorities. This facilitation included reviewing and evaluating the impact of their strategies on standards in these schools. The impact was positive and the schools involved valued the opportunity to reflect on their own practice and share successful practice with others. This funding ended in March 2022. However, the network continues to work together on agreed areas of focus and is well supported by the Primary Learning Adviser.

## **Post-16 Education**

There are six high schools in Flintshire with sixth forms and one FE college with a dedicated A level centre. Two high schools merged their sixth forms to create Flint 6<sup>th</sup>. In 2021, there were 662 learners in Year 13 and 589 in year 12. 65 post-16 learners are learning through the medium of Welsh at Ysgol Maes Garmon. All school sixth forms offer the Welsh BaccaLaureate, however, the number completing the full qualification differs between schools and years.

The Council continues to work closely with its six post-16 providers and in partnership with Coleg Cambria to shape post-16 provision for students and to ensure clear pathways to professional and

technical routes to employment, alongside robust academic routes. The appointment of a Post-16 Learning Adviser has added additional capacity to the portfolio's work. Regular meetings are held of the Post-16 network of schools to agree and review curriculum planning and local delivery. Annual plans are submitted to Welsh Government for scrutiny. The portfolio engages with the Economic Recovery Board who are keen to work with schools, particularly around developing apprenticeships.

The Minister for Education cancelled the 2021 summer examinations series due to the pandemic. No performance measures, including the consistent measures for achievement and value added, are available.

Welsh Government did not collect the data for SEREN for 2020 due to the pandemic. It may be therefore that some students achieved places at Russell Group Universities but didn't register for SEREN. In 2021, based on destination data available to the network, 60% of students gained a place at a Russell Group University. Nearly all other students took up a place at other universities or on specialist courses. A very few opted to defer their places until 2022.

### **Welsh Language Advisory Service**

The Welsh Advisory Team (WAT) consists of 3 staff; 2.8 full time equivalent teachers working in English and Welsh medium primary schools and 1 Admin Support Officer for 20hrs per week. This includes the Service Manager/Team Leader. There are 59 English-Medium primary schools and 5 Welsh-Medium primary schools. According to Welsh Government's language categorisation policy, all 59 English-Medium schools are defined as Category 5 schools and all 5 Welsh schools are defined as Category 1 Welsh-Medium primary schools.

The Team's main objectives are to contribute to Flintshire's Welsh in Education Strategy by improving standards in Welsh (first and second language) by improving the quality of teaching and developing the language skills of the education workforce in primary schools. The Team works in partnership with all primary schools within the local authority to raise standards of Welsh. This is carried out via a range of strategies and a targeted approach to achieve the best outcomes for learners and includes the direct training of teachers and teaching assistants through intensive language and methodology course as well as working collaboratively with other key partners e.g. GwE, Canolfan Bedwyr (providers of the Sabbatical courses), Urdd and Coleg Cambria. Members of the team represent the Council on local, regional and national panels, ensuring that Flintshire schools receive up to date information regarding broader priorities pertaining to the development of Welsh in schools.

The informal use of Welsh in all schools is very much a strategic priority. It is delivered by an appointed coordinator for Siarter Iaith (Welsh Language Charter) and PCAI (Prosiect Cefnogi Arferion Iaith / Supporting Welsh language use project) in Welsh medium primary and secondary schools and a designated person leading and co-ordinating Cymraeg Campus in English medium primary schools. All 5 Welsh medium primary schools in Flintshire have achieved their Gold award. All English medium primary schools in Flintshire have embarked on their journey with Cymraeg Campus, with 4 schools achieving the Silver Award, one of whom has now gone on to achieve the Gold Award. They are the first school in North Wales to achieve this.

Flintshire schools have consistently sought opportunities to further their language training through the WG funded sabbatical courses. Numbers attending from Flintshire have been consistently high on nearly all courses across the North Wales region. Between 2019 and 2022, 15 teachers have accessed the sabbatical programme. They continue to receive post course support from the Welsh in Education team in embedding their practice within their school. For September 2022, a further 7 Flintshire teachers have been allocated places and 2 for the spring term intermediate sabbatical course. The

Welsh Advisory Service work closely with the course providers, deliver methodology sessions during the courses and provide focused support to staff on their return to school, with a particular aim of supporting embedding of practice across the whole school.

One member of the team is designated to work with Welsh medium primary schools should any latecomers arrive at KS2. A programme of intervention is prepared by the Advisory Service and delivered by the school when the need arises. A member of the team also works closely with the Welsh secondary school supporting the 'Trochi' programme for Year 6 learners who transfer from English medium primary school into Welsh medium secondary. The service has made effective use of the first year of the additional funding stream (spring 2022) for Latecomers to Welsh medium education. This included projects for Foundation Phase, KS2 and KS3.

The Team continually evaluates its work to ensure schools receive a high quality service, refining its methods accordingly, e.g. results from the Welsh language skills section of the School Workforce Annual Census (SWAC) are used to identify support for language development, to create working parties of teachers refining curriculum planning for schools and for identifying schools to share good practice.

### **Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and Forum**

The Flintshire Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) for 2017-2020 was accepted by the Welsh Government in April 2018 and an Implementation Plan adopted by the Forum. The draft 10 year plan for 2022-2032 has recently been approved by Welsh Government following a period of public consultation and endorsement by the Council's Cabinet and Scrutiny process. The implementation of the WESP is driven and monitored by the Flintshire Welsh Strategic Forum made up of officers, elected members, school representatives and other organisations linked to the development of the Welsh language and Welsh medium education. A representative from Welsh Government regularly attends meetings of the Forum. The Forum is currently chaired by the Leader of Flintshire County Council who is also the Cabinet Member for Education & Youth.

The Forum works very effectively as a multi-agency platform for delivering and monitoring the WESP. All members bring high levels of knowledge and expertise to the Forum which are freely shared to achieve the common vision of promoting Welsh-medium education and the Welsh language. Most members of the Forum sit on one or more of the three sub-committees – Provision, Standards and Workforce. These meet at least once a term to work on their specific targets and then feed back their progress in the following termly Forum meeting. These sub-groups have each produced a highly focused action plan to support the overall WESP.

The Forum is very robust in holding the Council to account in its delivery of the Plan and achieving the targets contained within it. The Forum membership is regularly reviewed. Reports on the progress of the WESP are routinely presented to the Education, Youth and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Flintshire remains committed to build additional capacity in the Welsh Medium school network to support the WESP. Significant capital investment has been made through the Council's capital programme and through the Sustainable Learning Communities funding to improve facilities and increase the number of Welsh medium places available. Advanced planning is underway to review further opportunities for growth in Welsh medium schools including a new build for an existing Welsh medium school in Flint and a new start up Welsh medium school in the Buckley/Mynydd Isa area. This would deliver on the Council's key objective of having Welsh medium early years and primary school provision in every major town across the county.

## School Governance

The governor support role within the Education Portfolio (0.2fte) sits with the Senior Manager for Business Support. The part time provision and support provided to governing bodies is enhanced by access to the dedicated subscription resource and help line provided by the Governors Cymru web service. Exemplars of good practice from governing bodies in Flintshire are posted to the site.

The key functions of the service relate to supporting governing bodies in the following areas - Schools Causing Concern procedures; School Federations; Accelerated Improvement Boards; Interim Executive Boards; training and development, either through commissioning or direct delivery; administration of the Flintshire Governors Association; appointment of Local Authority governors to governing bodies, and securing governor nominations to the Schools Budget Forum and Education, Youth & Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The ability to offer face to face governor training remained curtailed during 2021/22 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Council continued to remain compliant with the statutory duty to offer the regulatory school governor training programme as the Welsh Government statutory governor training modules are available online. The online training portal registered 40 new log-ons during the year suggesting a good level of engagement with statutory training. Governing Bodies are able to monitor virtual attendance of their governors through the portal and are responsible for monitoring the impact of training on the discharge of their duties.

Non-statutory training modules continue to be developed in partnership between the six North Wales councils adding to the online training programme, with a module on the role of governors in 'pupil voice' becoming available during 2021/22. This year there has also been commissioning of virtual training from external partners on the role of governors in safeguarding and in data protection.

The network of North Wales Governor Support Officers continue to meet virtually each term with the GWE lead for Governor Support. The network continues to share approaches and resources to support governor development. GwE offers support to individual governing bodies, when requested, through their professional learning offer for 2021/22, including the roll-out of the new Curriculum for Wales. Similarly, there continues to be representation at the ADEW National network of Governor Support Officers who meet termly with representatives of Welsh Government. The Governor Development Manager for the Council is currently Vice Chair of the national network and contributor to a WG working group on review of schools complaints procedures.

Administration of the Flintshire Governors Association continues to be provided by the Council. The Forum is an effective, regular consultative platform and a timely vehicle for providing updates on key national and local issues. During the year a regular newsletter was issued updating governors on national/local developments. Meetings of the Schools Budget Forum, Education and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Welsh in Education Strategic Form are held virtually and there remains consistent representation by governors.

Although there are approximately 1250 governor positions within the Authority, the Council only has responsibility for administering the nomination of Local Authority governors to school governing bodies, approximately 400 nominations. Vacancies on governing bodies remain at a consistent level and no major concerns relating to 'resignations' arising have been reported by schools during the year in support of government recruitment. However, the Council has recently engaged with Governors for Schools, to 'skills-match' an applicant governor to a long standing vacancy within a special school. The Council does not capture data on governor ethnicity.

## **2.2 Support for Vulnerable Learners**

Flintshire provides a suitable range of services to promote social inclusion and support for learners with ALN through a combination of internal and externally commissioned services and provision. The Council meets its statutory duties well as demonstrated by the low levels of appeal to the SEN Tribunal and the low levels of young people becoming NEET.

Funding to support children with Special Educational Needs/Additional Learning Needs has been delegated to schools for a number of years now. Delegation of this funding has enabled schools to respond proactively to the needs of their school community and has resulted in a range of internal and external interventions being deployed. These include the use of Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs), FRIENDS group sessions, targeted therapeutic interventions and the development of sensory spaces.

The model for delegation to primary schools has been remodeled this year in response to the changes brought into place by the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET). This places greater autonomy on schools to develop provision at a universal level but also on a more targeted basis, as additional learning provision (ALP) for pupils identified as having ALN.

The Council has made a significant investment to support vulnerable learners in the form of a purpose built facility for its pupil referral unit, Plas Derwen. The new building opened to pupils in September 2021 and provides a specialist learning environment to support the academic and social emotional needs of the pupils. The move saw the coming together of four different centres and staff have worked hard to support a positive transition for the whole Plas Derwen community. Multi-agency intervention is an important aspect of the provision and the additional of weekly sessions from an Assistant Education Psychologist has been beneficial for the pupils and staff to aid the settling in process.

In terms of percentage expenditure, the services and provision to support children with a range of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties is comparatively higher than other areas of service under the learning inclusion umbrella. This is in direct response to Council priorities and presenting need. Where possible, services provide individual intervention to pupils however, the delivery model does focus on providing advice, guidance and training to build capacity and effect change within schools.

The focus on nurture and trauma-informed practice has been expanded and a range of training opportunities offered to schools and central services to support the development of this. The Behaviour Support Service has been rebranded as Nurture Outreach and operates as an outreach service from Plas Derwen.

### **Additional Learning Needs (ALN)**

Additional capacity has been allocated to the ALN team in response to the implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET). The team now comprises of a six Learning Advisers, including the Early Years ALN Lead Officer (ALNLO) and a dedicated ALN officer for looked after children. The Senior Learning Adviser for ALN manages the team and leads on the implementation of ALNET.

The Learning Advisors have continued to work to meet the statutory obligations in respect of children and young people with additional learning needs. Each of the officers has a cluster groups of schools and follow the pupils from entry into primary school, transition to secondary and on into post-16 provision. The department works within clear protocols and decision making processes to assess and make decisions regarding placement and provision for learners with ALN.

During the COVID-19 pandemic the ALN team continued to work from home, in line with national and

local guidance. Local Authority ALN/SEN Decision Making Panels continued to be held, with the use of online platforms to facilitate this process. All members of the team have the necessary equipment to enable them to continue to fulfil their roles. The use of online platforms has resulted in leaner working practices, with much reduced travel. This has resulted in financial and time savings.

During the pandemic the vast majority of annual reviews have taken place using alternative means. This has included telephone and online platform reviews. The officers provided support to schools and the PRU to ensure that the reviews for the academic year were completed. Thorough risk assessments was undertaken where it was necessary for an officer to attend an annual review in person. All annual review documentation is scrutinised by the Learning Adviser to ensure the provision remains appropriate and pupils are making suitable progress.

Family engagement remains a high priority and officers have worked hard to maintain build and maintain relationships remotely. There has been an individual approach to working with families, recognising that not all families have appropriate devices for online platforms. This approach has maintained the very low levels of appeal to tribunal against the Council. In 2021 there were only 2 appeals which were overturned in favour of the Council.

The Council responded proactively to the Welsh Government amendments to the implementation of ALNET in September 2021. Processes and systems were developed to allow the parallel working of the SEN and ALN statutory duties. Training and awareness raising sessions with schools and officers continued to ensure that schools and the Council were in a confident position to respond to the new requirements. The creation and development of the new IT ALN system, Eclipse, to support schools and the Council with the new ALN process has been a vast undertaking. This comprehensive system has been designed to ensure compliance with statutory duties in the absence of a national system. This has been a joint undertaking by four authorities across North Wales which has supported a collaborative approach to implementation.

Considerable time has been allocated to the identification of ALN through the development of a shared understanding of what constitutes Additional Learning Provision (ALP). Schools have worked in clusters, supported by ALN officers to develop this. A toolkit has been developed to offer further support to schools. This has had input from specialist services across the Portfolio to ensure a shared corporate approach and understanding. Multi-agency working has been important with regards to early years' identification of ALN, in particular with Health. Processes have been reviewed and revised to ensure that children are identified appropriately. A positive relationship has been developed with the Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer (DECLO) in Health which has supported a collaborative approach and a confidence that the correct children are being identified as having ALN.

The pandemic has had an impact on the Council's compliance with SEN Code of Practice timescales. A total of 124 Statements were issued in the academic year 2020/21, 52% of which were issued within the 26 week timescale. A further 41% were issued late but with permissible exceptions and the remainder were as a result of late advice, particularly from Health colleagues. Despite the delays, pupil needs were identified and provision was allocated pending the outcome of the statutory assessment process so as not to disadvantage any individual.

Officers have completed a number of school monitoring/support visits. ALNCos have provided positive feedback, indicating that they have appreciated the time to discuss matters on an individual basis. The importance of these visits has become paramount following the further delegation of funds to primary school budgets from April 2022 and will be a priority going forward.

Transition between primary and secondary phases was an issue for pupils again for the start of the

2021 academic year given the restrictions placed on schools around the mixing of pupils. Schools responded positively and proactively to provide meaningful transition experiences but this has been challenging for a number of pupils. The wider impact of COVID-19 on the educational experiences of pupils also led to an increased number of parents requesting more specialist provision for their children placing pressure on Resource base places. Despite this, the number of education day placements commissioned in specialist/independent not maintained by Flintshire has seen a downward trend, from 87 in 2018/19, 53 in 2019/20 to 46 in 2021/21, which is indicative of the positive engagement of the ALN team with families.

Destination data for pupils within Flintshire's specialist school indicate that of the 17 learners, 14 left with a qualification and went on to access the local further education institute and 1 went on to access a specialist college placement.

### **Education Welfare Service (EWS)**

The EWS has undergone a review following the Estyn recommendations in 2019. The service now comprises of a Team leader, 6 Education Welfare Officers and 2 Education Support Officers. This change has afforded greater service flexibility to offer support regarding attendance and exclusion in a targeted way. System reviews have been undertaken in a number of schools to ensure that a clear and graduated response to attendance is in place. The increased use of attendance data across the service has facilitated the appropriate targeting of this intervention. There is also a clearer delineation of roles, with officers having identified responsibilities for Elective Home Education, Children Missing Education and the link to the Youth Justice Service.

The ongoing impact of the pandemic has, however, resulted in two years of variable attendance data due to periods of closure and absence, and a result, it has not been possible to see the real impact of the service changes at this point. The use of statutory tools such as Fixed Penalty Notices in response to non-attendance was also suspended by Welsh Government. The EWS has played a pivotal role in pupil safety during the pandemic, making home visits where concerns were expressed by schools.

### **Elective Home Education (EHE)**

In line with other councils, Flintshire has seen an increase in the numbers of children becoming EHE with 172 children registered in April 2022 compared with 91 in 2018. The Local Authority lead officer for EHE is actively engaging in the national meetings and is working in collaboration with other regional leads to develop a co-ordinated approach across North Wales. The additional funding received from Welsh Government has enabled the appointment of a designated officer for EHE who provides information and advice and engages proactively with parents who wish their child to be educated at home. An information pack is circulated and annual visits are undertaken as part of the monitoring process. Officers work closely with colleagues across Social Services as required where safeguarding is deemed to be a concern and work proactively to secure a return to school where this is considered to be in the child's best interests.

### **Young Person's Counselling Service**

The Young Person's Counselling Service is an integral part of the Council's support mechanism to prevent young people from becoming vulnerable. All secondary schools, including the specialist school Ysgol Maes Hyfryd and Plas Derwen (PRU) are allocated designated counsellor time with referrals also being taken for Year 6 pupils. Group work sessions for younger children in primary schools has also been piloted in 6 schools this year with positive outcomes reported from the children, staff and parents. In addition, the service has also responded to requests for young people accessing college or in some cases who are NEET.

Levels of self-referral to the service are low with the majority of referrals coming from school-based staff or through the multi-agency Youth Engagement Progression Framework (YEPF) meetings. A triage system is now being implemented to ensure that a referral has been made to the correct service to support access to a timely and suitable intervention. Schools are also investing increasingly in a range of interventions to address mental health issues which provides further support in targeting counselling for those most in need of this. It is interesting to note a change in the nature of the presenting issues on referral which reflects the impact of the pandemic.

Table 6: Number of clients and presenting issues

	2020/21	2019/20
<b>Number of Clients</b>	308	226
<b>Number of sessions attended</b>	1351	933
<b>Presenting issues on referral (3 most common in rank order high to low)</b>	Anxiety Family Bereavement	Family Anxiety Behaviour related

All young people engaging with the Counselling service undertake an initial assessment (YP-Core) and this is repeated at the end of the intervention to measure impact. The information below shows that on average, the young people note a positive outcome following engagement with the sessions.

Table 7: Impact of the Young Person's Counselling Service

	2020/21	2019/20
Changes in the average result of the Young People's Core Score - Start of Episode	18.57	17.28
Changes in the average result of the Young People's Core Score - End of Episode	9.57	8.86

## TRAC

TRAC is a European funded project focused on supporting children between 11 and 16 to engage in education, training or employment. A total of 563 individuals were referred for TRAC intervention between April 2021 and March 2022. The pupils received support with regards to their attendance and wellbeing through a range of activities and interventions. Of these 137 have achieved additional qualifications and 242 have been identified as being at a reduced risk of becoming NEET. The project will cease after August 2022 as the funding comes to an end.

## Progression Team

The Engagement Progression Coordinator (EPC) works in partnership to co-ordinate support for pupils between the ages of 11 and 25 who are potentially at risk of disengagement or are currently not in education, employment or training (NEET). The EPC manages the Progression Team who support the potential NEETS. The team receive referrals for pupils who are starting to, or have disengaged from education from Education Welfare Officers or teachers. The EPC ensured links with other relevant services such as TRAC, Youth Justice, Sorted Drug and Alcohol Team and the Young Person's Counselling Service.

Home visits are made by the Progression Team to build rapport and explore the pupils' interests and needs. This engagement work supports pupils to participate in a range of alternative education activities. Support for transition between school and post-16 provision was a priority during the summer months of 2021. The Team supported 147 individuals across the year, 110 of which were Year 9 to

Year 11 and 37 who were post-16. A total of 12 pupils were supported into further education, 2 into an apprenticeship and 3 into employment. A further 13 individuals were supported to transition into Communities for Work or to gain further targeted support for mental health difficulties through services such as the Resilience team.

A further 612 pupils were supported through activities organised by the EPC funded through the Winter of Wellbeing Welsh Government funding. The pupils achieved a range of qualifications, vocational skills and experience along with positive improvement in self-esteem and wellbeing.

The level of year 11 NEET has remained low over the past 4 years as a result of the targeted multi-agency work across the authority, underpinned by the work of the EPC and the Progression Team.

Table 8: Year 11 Leavers (%) from schools in Wales known to be not in education, employment or training (NEET)

	2021	2020	2019	2018
<b>Flintshire</b>	1.4 (23)	1.2 (19)	1.9 (28)	1.2 (18)
<b>Wales</b>	1.6 (507)	1.7 (527)	1.8 (537)	1.6 (476)

Source: Careers Wales

Table 9: Year 12 and 13 Leavers (%) in Flintshire known not to be in education, employment or training (NEET)

	2021	2020	2019	2018
<b>Flintshire Year 12</b>	0.3 (2)	1.1 (6)	0	0
<b>Wales Yr 12</b>	0.4 (55)	0.6 (76)	0.8 (99)	0.7 (90)
<b>Flintshire Year 13</b>	3.4 (19)	3.7 (20)	2.9 (16)	2.5 (15)
<b>Wales Yr 13</b>	2.3 (251)	3.5 (355)	2.5 (269)	2.5 (279)

## Education Psychology Service (EPS)

Recruitment of Educational Psychologists (EPs) remains challenging and has resulted in the appointment of 3 Assistant Educational Psychologists to offer additional support to the team. The ratio of EPs to pupils in Flintshire remains the most challenging in Wales sitting at 1:7089 pupils compared with the Welsh average of 1:5154 (range 1:1750 - 1:7089). The issue of recruitment has been raised with Welsh Government, with the challenge being accentuated in the North given the location of the doctorate training course being based in South Wales. The Principal Education Psychologist has also become a member of the interview panel and management committee of the Cardiff training course in an attempt to effect change.

The EPS completed 134 statutory assessments in the last year under the SEN Code which is 93.2% completed within the allocated timescale or with permissible exceptions. Despite the high level of requests for statutory assessment, the team continued to offer group consultation sessions covering a range of topics including:

- Emotionally-Based School avoidance
- Autism
- Social and emotional wellbeing
- Person centred planning tools
- Attention and concentration

During the Summer Term 2021, the Group Consultation model was subject to evaluation by a trainee on placement with the team. The research found “The questionnaire data reveals that although ALNCoS experiences vary, the majority of ALNCo participants reported positive experiences and strongly agreed that GC was a good use of time and helpful for gaining strategies for individual pupils

as well as the whole school”.

EPs are a standing member of the 2 new ALN panels under ALNET.

### **Communication & Language Advisory Support Service**

The pandemic has had a notable impact on the speech, language and communication skills of pupils, with teachers identifying a particular impact on children in the Foundation Phase. The Learning Adviser for Speech, Language & Communication has worked closely with Health and family support services to develop an appropriate training package for schools and early years' settings.

Flintshire is the first authority to roll out the Talkboost training offer to all primary schools. To date, 40 schools have engaged with the training, resulting in 288 trained staff. Data collection is at an early stage with regards to the intervention however, the initial reports from 13 schools shows a positive impact when considering pre and post intervention assessment. All pupils were seen to have a positive improvement in their skills, with 75% moving from having language skills at a below age expected level to achieving age expected levels. The area highlighted as having the biggest overall impact following training was social interaction which ties in with the concerns over isolation due to the pandemic.

### **Support for English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Gypsy Travellers**

The number of pupils identified as having EAL has increased by 84 pupils to 1491 this year, with 53 languages being spoken across Flintshire schools in addition to English and Welsh. All pupils are assessed with regards to their language capabilities and appropriate support allocated either on an individual or group work basis. In the region of 50 pupils have accessed support in the Foundation Phase through the Language Development project and feedback from schools regarding the project impact remains positive. No pupils with EAL have needed access to additional support to engage with their education.

As well as supporting pupils and schools in relation to EAL, the service has supported a number of refugees including 40 Afghan children, 23 children under the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme and 1 child under the Ukrainian sponsorship scheme during this reporting period. All pupils and families have had access to EAL intervention and wrap-around support services. The response from schools to supporting children and families has been excellent with pupils settling well into their new schools and communities.

The number of Traveller children attending school saw a notable dip at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the primary sector where attendance is usually stronger. Numbers have been increasing gradually since December as staff have been able to physically re-engage with families and numbers are back to figures similar to those prior to the pandemic. Engagement with the secondary sector remains challenging despite the offer of alternative curriculum projects and significant outreach work with families. Transience also remains a challenge with Flintshire continuing to have a high transient Traveller population.

Additional Welsh Government funding was received this year to support the increase in numbers across minority ethnic groups. In response, an Additional Curriculum Advisory teacher and coordinator were appointed from September 2021 to deliver a range of alternative activities to pupils with EAL, Travellers and other vulnerable children such as those who are Looked After by the Council in its role as corporate parent. The focus of the interventions was to support the development of self-esteem and confidence as well as developing a sense of identity, belonging and community participation. The development of friendships and relationships were also key to support individual wellbeing. To date, 70 pupils from KS2/3 have engaged with the project, 35 pupils with EAL and 10 from the Traveller community and 25 who were Looked After. Schools report an improvement in the following areas:

- Increased engagement in lessons/wider school community
- Increased engagement with other pupils
- Willingness to ask for help
- Improved self-esteem, confidence and positive mood
- Ability to regulate emotions with a reduction in the frequency of emotional outbursts

The funding was also used to create additional capacity within the Nurture Outreach service specifically for targeted vulnerable groups. There has been a positive response from schools following the input noting improvements such as a greater ability to play with others, improved engagement and lower levels of anxiety being displayed.

### **Support for raising the educational achievement of Looked After Children**

The levels of children who are 'looked after' have remained fairly stable over the past 3 years, 255 in 2019, 259 in 2020 and 258 in 2021. The number of those of school age varies year on year, with there being 178 in 2021. Specific funding to support improved outcomes for 'looked after' children comes in the form of the Pupil Development Grant which is overseen by GwE at a regional level. Schools are required to operate in clusters and bid for funding, with the bids being overseen by local officers. This year, the funding has been targeted at a range of training and interventions, including the following:

- Nurture training and intervention
- developing trauma informed practice
- Training on Emotion Coaching, Emotional Literacy and Friends Resilience programmes
- Therapeutic type interventions, e.g. Lego therapy, Unearthing boxes, Positive Power of Play, sensory room

The Council is looking to pilot the use of a screening tool with children who are 'looked after' to measure the impact of interventions with a higher level of consistency. Similar to other pupils, the pandemic has impacted on levels of engagement across this specific cohort, with the average attendance sitting at 88% for 2021. The destination data for Year 11 pupils who are 'looked after' indicated that 69% of the cohort went on to access a post 16 placement in a school, college or with the armed forces.

### **Sensory Service**

During this reporting year the service has continued to support schools to meet the educational and emotional needs of sensory impaired pupils - 75 pupils with a visual impairment (VI) and 115 with hearing impairments (HI). Support for families of pre-school children remained a key priority for the service during the year but this was more of a challenge due to the nature of this provision. Garden visit support and remote support was offered wherever possible. There were 9 preschool children with HI and 7 with VI. The service continued to use national eligibility criteria to determine the level of involvement although due to the pandemic, visits were not always possible and were replaced by remote support via emails/phone calls/video conferencing as appropriate.

The continued aim of the service is to build capacity within schools/placements in supporting children and young people with sensory impairment. Bespoke packages were offered at both a county and school level and 12 schools/settings were offered virtual training via Microsoft TEAMS in Flintshire with excellent feedback received. Professional development opportunities, both formal and informal was felt to be of extreme value in helping staff understand the needs of the learner as well as improve their own communication with parents. Provision of specialist equipment was also highlighted as having improvements on behaviour and independence. Parents have also appreciated the efforts of the team in being flexible and working remotely/outside to provide the service safely in times of pandemic

restrictions.

## Emotional Health and Wellbeing

Flintshire has an established multi-agency forum to oversee and guide its response to emotional health and wellbeing. The forum has identified training needs and prioritised the allocation of the WG Wellbeing grant. The Council is developing a relational approach to practice and intervention across its services and schools. Nurture intervention and trauma informed practice were identified as key areas for investment and training for this remains a priority given the impact of the pandemic.

The feedback from the training has been positive with a high percentage of participants indicating that the courses offered would lead to a positive impact on their work with children. The Education Psychology Service is leading on the supervision/follow up support with the aim of developing and embedding practice.

Table 10: Training offered to support Emotional Health & Wellbeing

Training/support	Number of staff trained
ELSA initial training	69
ELSA Supervision	37
Emotion Coaching	290
Emotionally Based School Avoidance	110
Meditation for staff wellbeing with option to train to use with staff	53
Trauma informed schools awareness raising	141
Therapeutic Story writing pilot	4
Story Links pilot	4
National Nurture Schools Programme/ Whole School Nurture Approach for Learning	25 schools

The Education Portfolio has also reviewed its Serious Incident Policy with regards to process and support in response to the sad rise in the number of tragic events involving children and young people. The Education Psychology Service has offered support and guidance to school leaders when responding to serious incidents such as the death of member of the school community. The Young Person's Counselling Service has also offered immediate support to the pupils in response to such incidents. The feedback from schools in relation to this support has been positive.

In September 2021 the 'Challenging Bullying online reporting system' was introduced for Flintshire schools which was developed by Flintshire IT and hosted on the 'Flintshire Workspace' platform. This enables schools to report incidents of bullying, including racist incidents, on an online form and maintain these in one place and update as required. 'Challenging Bullying' sits alongside health and safety incident reporting on the platform and staff illness absence. Designated officers have access to this data which enables the LA to maintain an overview of recorded bullying incidents in order to identify emerging trends or groups being discriminated against, monitor exclusion rates. Long term, as the system embeds, the aim is that the data would show progress towards the Council's equality objectives.

## **Early Help Hub (EHH)**

In early 2017 the Flintshire Public Service Board (PSB) commissioned the establishment of an Early Help Hub to support the delivery of more timely and appropriate early intervention and support for families with greater needs. There were multiple drivers for this including the introduction of the Social Service and Wellbeing Act 2014, the CSSIW inspection report recommendations about prioritising early intervention, intervening earlier at lower cost and for better outcomes and the extent to which so many cases being referred and re-referred to Children's Services did not meet thresholds for a statutory intervention, notwithstanding that the families often presented with persistent challenges.

Since inception in 2017 Flintshire's Early Help hub model has continued to develop and adapt to the ever changing circumstances and landscape of support needed across the county. The Early Help Hub is now a well-established provision prioritizing early intervention for families, receiving approximately 10,995 referrals since inception, of which 83% are for school aged children and above. There are a total of 16 agencies including health, education, police, housing and third sector representatives participating in hub discussions and actioning support to ensure families receive services at the point struggles start to emerge in their family journey.

All services participating utilise the Paris system to record information allowing quick escalation if a concern comes to light as part of hub information gathering and an efficient step down process for families where child protection is not the most appropriate route. This has dramatically decreased the number of 'No Further Action' decisions (NFA's) and all families receive an offer of support. Recent work through Vanguard has united and streamlined the 'front door' processes for Children's Services and Early Intervention and work is currently being undertaken to ensure a what matters conversation is held with families at the point of referral, ensuring the families voice is at the heart of any decision making process.

The Hub development has been supported strategically by the Chief Officer for Education and Youth and led on behalf of the portfolio by the Senior Manager for Integrated Youth Provision who has responsibility for commissioning Families First, The Hub has also been actively supported by the Senior Manager for Inclusion and Progression. The IYP Families First commissioning has been a key driver in the development of the EHH throughout and continues to commission and fund a significant element of the delivery. Families First has a consortia approach to three elements with a variety of services and partners commissioned to provide a range of support to families. The lead agencies commissioned into the Hub are:

- **Y Teulu Cyfan (Families First-Parenting)** leading on direct interventions with families the consortia provide needs led approaches to supporting families at early stages of problems preventing issues escalating further. The model utilizes trauma informed approaches to support families, recognizing signs and responding appropriately with needs led, flexible, effective provision including 1:1 home based provision, volunteer support, counselling for parents, family therapy and coordinated family plans.

- **Action for Children (Families First – Young People)** leading on targeted 1-1 working and group work with young people and families and the engagement of young people up to the age of 25 in education, employment, volunteering and work experience through the Resilience Project. They will also draw upon their effective partnerships with the Flintshire Local Voluntary Council and Aura, the local provider of leisure services.

**- Action for Children (Families First) – Disability** leading on the provision of support and services for families with disabled children/young people to ensure better engagement in social, leisure, play and sporting opportunities to improve physical and mental health and transition into adulthood.

Nominated staff from the Education and Youth portfolio have remained a consistent and integral part of the offer, evolving from one education representative to the current inclusion of the Education Welfare Team. This has facilitated a wider dissemination of the knowledge shared as part of the process to schools and their wider partners and enabled comprehensive sharing of information regarding children and families. During the last quarter 28% of referrals to hub came from education and 11% of actions allocated to the education representatives. The team disseminate valuable information about families and their needs enabling an appropriate and effective support package to be identified, as well as providing a valuable conduit to support often linking families and encouraging engagement with the identified services. All referrals receive an action, whether that be a single service provision, multiple service or voluntary sector information support. This is an innovative and highly effective model of support that is having a tangible impact on children and families.

### **2.3 Other Education Support Services**

#### **Funded Part Time Early Years Provision – Early Entitlement**

Flintshire has a long tradition of supporting early years' education and during 2021-22 had 74 settings registered to deliver part time, early education for three year olds – 22 playgroups, 20 day nurseries and 32 schools supporting 710 children. Provision is for 10 hours of funded education per week.

Despite the removal of the grant conditions by Welsh Government to provide '10%' teacher time for funded settings and reducing central resources, the Council continues to maintain appropriate levels of support to settings registered for early education delivery to ensure high quality standards of provision, which in turn leads to better outcomes for learners. A central team of 4.2 fte teachers and 1 specialist learning assistant work across the settings to provide targeted role modelling of teaching, to develop quality learning environments and support setting staff to produce robust self-evaluation reports and improvement action plans as required by the Estyn framework.

The core team is also supported in this delivery by a number of early years' teachers in schools, funded by the Council, where the local playgroup is the main feeder into the school nursery class. Initially developed as a strategy to maintain delivery in the face of reducing budgets and recruitment restrictions, there have been other intended benefits of this approach such as improved transition arrangements for pupils and sharing of best practice. However, the school based teachers have acknowledged their reliance on the Council's core EE team who are real experts in provision for 3 year olds. All support teachers produce pre-inspection reports on settings and assist with post-inspection action plans. Where settings require follow up after an inspection, particularly in the more significant categories, then the level of support is increased.

The Council still has sufficient capacity to deliver the number of early education places required. As an early implementer of the Welsh Government's 30 hour Free Childcare Offer, many settings have registered as joint providers so this additional funding provides some mitigation in the sector. The Welsh Government acknowledged the pressure on settings to maintain a combined delivery of early years' education and childcare with a difference in funding rates. This resulted in WG using Flintshire as a pilot authority for the provision of additional funding to equalise the rates of payment. WG then monitored the impact on protecting educational provision within the 30 hour offer. This pilot began in January 2019 and because of its positive impact in the sector, WG has confirmed that they will continue to provide this additional funding to the Council.

Flintshire continues to work closely with Mudiad Meithrin, the Welsh-medium early years' organisation, to develop new Welsh language provision in key geographical locations in the county as part of its Welsh in Education Strategy (WESP). There is currently sufficient capacity to deliver Welsh medium early years' education but the aim is to increase this as a stepping stone to more children accessing their full time education in a Welsh medium school and support the WG target of 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050. A new Cylch developed by Mudiad Meithrin opened in May 2019 in Buckley and this is part of a longer term strategy through the WESP and WG capital funding schemes to create a new Welsh medium primary school provision in the Buckley/Mynydd Isa area.

The Early Years Pupil Development Grant (EYPDG) has been used by the Early Entitlement Team (EET) since 2015 for the professional development of the non-maintained workforce with a focus on strengthening staff impact on the engagement, well-being and performance of disadvantaged learners. For the 2020-21 financial year, the majority of the grant was used to enable the EET to assess the influence of EYPDG funded training and support to date and to then act upon the information gained to improve future support of vulnerable learners. A proportion was used to provide each non-maintained EE setting with funding to be used specifically to support the engagement, well-being and performance of disadvantaged learners. Non-maintained EE setting staff were asked to consider disadvantaged learners in their own settings, to identify appropriate resources to develop the specific skills of those learners and to inform the EET of those resources and skills. The EET approved/ did not approve each resource request and in doing so were able to gain further insight into settings which showed understanding of the challenges faced by disadvantaged learners and the methods of addressing these challenges.

The support provided for an EE child with developmental delays or difficulties traditionally takes place within the setting. The EET offer advice to setting staff on strategies that they can use with the child. As many EE settings closed for large parts of the last financial year as a result of the pandemic, the EET had to adapt the format of this support which resulted in more direct contact by the Team with parents rather than through the setting staff. The EET's Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo) checked on the wellbeing of EE registered children during lockdown periods and offered parents strategies for supporting the children's development if required. Parents expressed their gratitude for this contact and for the ALNCo's input. The ALNCo's direct involvement with parents has highlighted the valuable insight this interaction can provide and the more rounded picture the EE service has gained of individual children.

The EE Service has increased the ALNCo's level of involvement with setting staff and the impact has been that there are now more structured approaches to offering strategies for supporting individual EE children identified as having particular needs. Feedback on this increased specialised input indicates that staff feel the strategies are having a positive impact on the child/children's engagement in learning. Support for children with developmental delays or difficulties is an area which the EET is focusing on in partnership with Childcare Services and the Inclusion Service in order to create a more integrated process for requesting and receiving support under the new ALNET Act (Wales).

Partnership working on a local, regional and national level has always been a strength of the EE Service but this expanded further during the pandemic. There was an increased volume of meetings between local services/ stakeholders which highlighted the need for clear, open and consistent communications. During the Summer Term 2020 the EE Team leader worked collaboratively with other services (Flying Start and Childcare Development) to create documents clarifying the COVID-19 response in the Early Years and to appropriately place vulnerable children under the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme (CCAS).

The EET works in partnership with Flying Start, the Childcare Development Team and the Inclusion

Service to agree an ALN training programme for the non-maintained sector. EET helped the Inclusion Service to create a document which would form the basis of future ALN training for the early years non-maintained sector. Other services then provided further input (Flying Start, Childcare Development Team, Speech and Language Service, Educational Psychology Service) to create a document with agreed content. EET work cooperatively with Social Services teams to identify a range of resources suitable for supporting children's speech, language and physical skills. This work was to make effective use of a Welsh Government grant given to support children's development due to the impact of COVID-19. EET worked in partnership with the Early Years Pathfinder Project to identify opportunities for extending good practice in Flying Start settings into EE settings which resulted in the piloting of 'Wellcomm' - a speech and language screening tool.

Regionally the EET continues to work in partnership with other North Wales EE Teams and the EE Team Leader attends local and regional meetings supporting ALN transformation work. On a national level EET members continue to support the work of Estyn through their stakeholder meetings and also support Welsh Government's working parties on the development of the new curriculum.

### **Integrated Youth Provision – Youth and Play Services including Play Sufficiency**

Play services have been embedded into Flintshire's Integrated Youth Provision (IYP) since 2017. The Council has a strong tradition of providing safe spaces and quality play opportunities for young children during summer holidays. This also includes Welsh language provision. The service has an excellent track record in partnership working with over 30 Town and Community Councils to deliver these quality play schemes. The schemes also offer employment for the young Flintshire workforce (Majority aged 18 – 25) and supports the workforce development target for the Council.

Flintshire County Council upholds Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 which places a statutory duty on all local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children, and to consider the many aspects of community life that affect play opportunities e.g. use of the environment; traffic and transport; play and leisure provision, and parental and community involvement with play. Flintshire is effective in adhering to the statutory guidance, 'Wales – A Play Friendly Country'.

The Education Portfolio has maximised the impact of the All Wales Play Opportunities Grant from Welsh Government. A key success has been the *Playful Futures* schools project, which has improved opportunities for play across a range of school settings. It has made a major difference to the school day by creating more playful environments, supporting pupil voice and training midday supervisors and there is clear evidence that the projects have impacted positively on the quality of children's play as well as their health and wellbeing.

Lack of capacity within some service areas to deliver some activity agreed in the Play Sufficiency Action Plan was identified as a concern during the most recent audit process. As a result, Flintshire County Council is prioritising a strategic approach to drive forward local annual action plans and is being supported in this by Play Wales.

The play development delivery staff continue to engage a range of statutory and non-statutory partners and this has enhanced the inclusive range of opportunities, such as working specifically on traveller sites to provide and enhance play opportunities as well as continuing successful programmes such as Kicks for Kids Football, Shed Project Play, Forest Schools and a drama project with Theatr Clwyd Cymru.

To improve monitoring and performance, the registration and general administration for the summer programme has been switched online, thus allowing for efficient reporting against key indicators as well

as swift communication with key partners such as Corporate Health and Safety and Town and Community Councils.

The Integrated Youth Provision Team deliver a diverse range of targeted and open access activities across Flintshire, both directly, and through working in collaboration with a range of statutory, non-statutory and voluntary organisations. Core council funding for the service is supplemented by Welsh Government grant funding streams e.g. Youth Support Grant and Families First Grant.

The service delivers traditional club based activity as well as detached youth work, school immersion work, Welsh language provision, homelessness prevention, a Forest School, Duke of Edinburgh Scheme, a Resilience Programme, LGBTQ+ Youth Club and the Youth Council. During Covid, much of this provision was placed online, but young people overwhelmingly indicated that they want to move back to a face to face provision so the service has moved back to this over the year as restrictions have been removed. The provision of digital services will continue to be developed to enhance the service.

Provision for youth services is planned in conjunction with partners, such as Aura Leisure and Libraries, NEWCIS Young Carers, the Urdd and Theatre Clwyd. The service has been innovative in supporting Aura staff to upskill and achieve Level 2 and 3 youth work qualifications as part of the doorstep sport provision and to potentially grow its own future workforce. The service has also provided grants to partners to support delivery across Flintshire and/or, for the benefit of Flintshire residents e.g. to Newcis Young Carers. The service also supports the Inspire Project in partnership with Wrexham County Borough Council to provide bespoke youth support services those young people who self-harm or are at risk of suicide ideation. The service has a longstanding partnership with Theatr Clwyd which has resulted in powerful interactive drama opportunities for young people to explore key issues such as consent. During the pandemic the service commissioned Theatr Clwyd to work with young people to develop a platform to share their stories of lock down and create supportive networks for young people which has received widespread recognition for its success, including support from the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

Internally, regular meetings occur with the Youth Justice Service and Sorted (Drug and Alcohol Team), to share insights and maximise resources, as well as with other partnerships e.g. groups commissioned via the Families First funding. IYP is also a key member of the Flintshire VARM/ASB partnership, a multi-agency group tasked with identifying and reducing ASB and police demand through a collaborative approach. This enables the service to effectively target its intervention work through its detached work team in particular communities as needs arise.

In the past 12 months the IYP service has supported refugees from both Afghanistan and the Ukraine, most notably within the Forest School provision, in a range of activities and created networking and social opportunities for young people and also their parents/carers.

Work is ongoing with Glyndwr University in order to place a number of students as well as providing Continuing Professional Development for all staff, and a young leaders course which is a result of requests from young people themselves currently volunteering within clubs. Agored Cymru qualifications are available to participants across all programmes. Recruitment of fully qualified youth workers remains very challenging so initiatives such as these are designed to grow the workforce from within the service.

Duke of Edinburgh (DoE) participants from Flintshire County Council dedicated 1183 hours to volunteering between April 2021 and March 2022, with a social value of £5465.46. In total 469 learners were registered in the past 12 months and are working towards completing their awards. 10 of the 11 Secondary schools in Flintshire registered learners for the scheme.

Further partnerships have been created with Airbus, who have been providing staff hours and material donations for the Forest School and Buckley Town Football Club, who have been supported by qualified JNC Youth Workers within the IYP service to start their own youth club and will be mentored through their journey in order to develop sector leading practice.

A cross border partnership between the Flintshire and Wrexham Youth Services was formed to develop a joint consultation process to support and inform both Public Service Boards and other partner organisations on the effects of COVID-19 on young people's mental Health. The results of the 20/21 consultation was presented to the PSB's and distributed to partner organisation to inform delivery.

Young people's voices are continuously canvassed and the service has amended its provision where appropriate to reflect their opinions. The service has been as flexible and reactive in provision wherever possible to ensure it could respond quickly to changing need/priorities, particularly through the pandemic. Examples of how IYP have responded include:

"What Just Happened Project" - a filmed drama presentation that gave voice to the words of young people e.g. NEWCIS young carers, youth groups, schools groups etc. This film was premiered on January 27<sup>th</sup> 2022 to an invited audience including WG officers and Elected Members.

A Young Persons bi-lingual leaflet and online professional resource that responded to the key issues expressed by young people – mental health, suicide ideology, domestic violence etc. This leaflet is distributed across the Council's youth service provision and will be updated to reflect the results of the 2022 consultation.

Provision was developed by sourcing funding from the Summer of Fun and Winter of Wellbeing grants to the Council, to reflect young people's feelings of frustration, poor mental health and isolation e.g. Wepre Park Project, (bi-lingual) music and arts mental health and wellbeing projects "Can Y Lles and Lles Y Gaef, LGBTQ group and Looked After Children's wellbeing packs.

Evidence across all IYP projects and supported by the joint Flintshire Wrexham consultation clearly identified that LGBTQ+ YP had struggled throughout Covid so a number of provisions were developed as a response. e.g. Inspire Pride through which young people were supported virtually. Numbers attending increased during COVID-19. The Inspire Pride group continues to run and any young person working with Inspire from Flintshire can attend the group which has now transitioned to face to face delivery. A partnership between Integrated Youth Provision and Theatre Clwyd was established and a LGBTQ+ group was created after a consultation event with young people in April 2022. The group runs fortnightly on alternative Tuesdays to Inspire sessions so LGBTQ+ young people have access to a range of groups.

In addition to the core youth provision of clubs and detached work in communities, the service has also established School and Community Immersion Youth Workers in five secondary schools including Welsh medium, which provide specialist youth service interventions in the areas of Mental Health, Sexual Health, Relationships, Child Sexual Exploitation and Modern Slavery. The support ranges from group sessions and 1 to 1 sessions, and also focuses on mental health and wellbeing, anger management, anti-bullying and respecting others, building confidence and self -esteem, relationships and stress and anxiety support and resilience along with lunch time drop in sessions and signposting to other services. The team also provide community work, supporting young people in their school and community settings and any crossover issues are managed i.e. community cohesion, anti-social behavior, bullying (often involving social media etc.). This community work has also included a parent drop in sessions for parents to voice their opinions, issues and concerns to the youth work team and source advice. At one Flintshire high school, the School and Community Immersion Worker supports a project working in partnership with the Portfolio's Inclusion Team and school staff to work positively

with students on improving behaviour and attendance in order to improve engagement and pupil outcomes.

The IYP team developed a comprehensive Transition Support resource for students in years 6, 7 and 8 students in response to evidence that these learners were struggling the most, having missed out on face to face transition activities for the move from primary to secondary education during the pandemic. A targeted youth club provision was established in one area of the county for year 6, 7 and 8 students to build resilience in mental health, wellbeing and confidence and self-esteem as a result of concerns expressed by the local high school.

In the county's only Welsh medium high school young people received support directly from the service through its Welsh Language Immersion Worker in response to feelings of isolation and poor mental health being expressed by students. These sessions encouraged students to express other concerns about sexuality and homophobia and the service responded proactively by commissioning other specialist organisations to provide information and other support mechanisms to young people.

This level of activity clearly demonstrates the responsive and wide ranging services provided to Flintshire's young people over the last twelve months and how interventions have been tailored to meet specific needs alongside universal provision.

### **Youth Justice Services & Flintshire Sorted**

The Youth Justice Service (YJS) has a rolling cohort figure of around 60-70 young people that they are working with at any one time. Around 29% of these young people are on Statutory Orders from Court or the Police but the majority are working with the service on a pre-court order or on a voluntary, prevention basis. The latest age 10-17 population figure for Flintshire (2011) was 14,711 so the YJS is working with on average 0.54% of the population of children and young people age 10-17 in Flintshire.

Whilst the YJS does not have a statutory obligation to provide Education, Training, and Employment (ETE), the service facilitates access to education through assessment and signposting/referral, and will provide cohort information to Education colleagues to ensure a cross-portfolio approach.

All young people involved within the YJS undergo a comprehensive holistic assessment which assesses their likelihood of re-offending, risk of serious harm to others in addition to their safety and wellbeing needs. This also includes issues and concerns relating to education, training and employment, physical health and emotional and mental health.

All children and young people entering the YJS are assessed by a dedicated Education Support Worker who will assess and highlight any attendance or additional support needs and will inform the relevant YJS and Education colleagues to ensure that appropriate support plans are in place. Attendance is also monitored at monthly YJS ETE Panels and information is shared with colleagues within Education, local colleges and Careers Wales in order to support and address attendance and access to education, training and employment.

The YJS is also a standing member on the Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) panel which provides opportunities for the service to raise the needs of children and young people open to them who are experiencing difficulties in school attendance and engagement.

The three year Youth Justice Plan is committed to the following priorities:

- Increasing the number of young people in Education, Training and Employment (ETE)
- Increasing the range of ETE opportunities for children and young people
- Equipping the workforce with trauma informed approaches and restorative justice solutions.

The YJS reports ETE performance to the Youth Justice Board and local performance frameworks on a quarterly basis. These key performance indicators are a measure of the education provision a young person is offered and engages in through the lifetime of the Court Order. If a young person is not being offered appropriate provision, the Education Support Worker within the YJS will liaise with the Education Service, Careers Wales or local colleges to improve provision, and then the YJS Case Manager will support the young person to ensure that their engagement is maintained.

The YJB National Performance indicator only looks at those young people whose Statutory Court Orders have closed in the reporting period and therefore is a much smaller cohort than that reported upon locally. Due to the low numbers, the Youth Justice Board is reconsidering its criteria and is planning to include young people on prevention programmes for future reporting to give a timelier overview of the work being undertaken.

The YJS has committed to undertaking work with Public Health Wales, the Youth Justice Board and Wrexham Glyndwr University to become a recognised trauma informed service building on its previous success of implementing an Enhanced Case Management (ECM) approach utilising the Trauma Recovery Model. Whilst access to ECM during the pandemic was paused due to capacity within the Forensic Adolescent Child Treatment Service (FACTS), the YJS has been working to improve access to this support. Whilst not all children and young people will access this formal intervention, the YJS service has continued to train staff including 'trauma champions' through the Youth Justice Effective Practice Award to ensure all YJS staff have the ability to respond to the needs of children and young people who may have experienced trauma or adverse childhood experiences.

Flintshire Sorted (Young People's Drug and Alcohol Team) aims to prevent substance use and to minimise the impact of substance use on children and young people, families and the community. It provides a universal, targeted and specialist service to children and young people up to the age of 20 years.

Despite the restrictions imposed during the pandemic, Flintshire Sorted has continued to offer this service within secondary schools across the county. The targeted content aims to promote healthy choices, challenge attitudes to drugs, anti-social behaviour and other risky behaviours, and strengthen protective factors. Flintshire Sorted provide universal delivery via awareness raising of the risk of using substances through the PSE (Personal, Social, Education) curriculum in schools and via outreach delivery within the community. Flintshire Sorted offer a referral based service for more intensive work with young people whose substance misuse is having a negative impact on their lives. A range of therapeutic interventions is offered to meet the individual needs of young people and help them to make changes and lead healthier lifestyles. The service also provides a consultation service for parents and professionals who may have questions about suspected substance use in their children.

Between April 2021 and March 2022:

- 182 sessions were held in 10 secondary schools and colleges, with the team re-establishing themselves in schools once they reopened following COVID-19 related closures. 503 young people were engaged in these sessions
- Community Outreach sessions in 10 communities engaging 99 people
- Drug and Alcohol Community Support Sessions took place with trained staff attending identified hotspots for anti-social behaviour where substances were an issue. The staff offered support and advice to young people at risk of offending, and provided targeted support session to individuals and groups. They were also able to direct young people to specialist services.
- 78 young people received a targeted intervention.

- 81% of young people reported that they had met their goals i.e. had gained more knowledge of substances, understood the long term effects of drugs, and/or had quit alcohol or smoking.

## **Healthy Schools & Healthy Pre-Schools**

The Healthy Schools Scheme was suspended for a period of time during the pandemic but has now been reinstated. During that time members of the team were redirected to support the initial roll out of the Track, Trace and Protect service within the Council.

In Flintshire four staff are funded by Public Health Wales to support schools and pre-school settings to actively participate in both the healthy schools and pre-schools programme. The Flintshire Healthy Schools Scheme works to ensure that health education and promotion becomes an integrated part of the school curriculum as well as part of the ethos of the school and community. The Scheme was established in Flintshire in 2002 and works in partnership with local and national organisations to ensure a coordinated and multi-faceted approach to health within schools. The Healthy and Sustainable Pre School Scheme (HSPSS) was launched nationally in 2011 and was developed as an extension of the Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Scheme (WNHSS). The criteria for the HSPSS have clear parallels with the WNHSS National Quality Award to ensure a consistent whole-school / setting approach to health and wellbeing.

Of the 46 pre-school settings 37 have completed the nutrition and oral health theme and 37 have completed the physical activity and active play theme. This is an increase in the number of Early Years Settings achieving the Physical Activity/Play and Nutrition and Oral Health benchmarks overall within the Flintshire HSPSS.

The Flintshire team has worked proactively with the Implementation Lead in order to develop a regional model in North Wales for the Whole School Approach to Emotional Health and Wellbeing developed by Welsh Government. 4 schools were identified in Flintshire to participate in a pilot for the self-assessment tool. The Implementation Lead held 'drop-in' sessions across the region during autumn 2021 which were supported by Healthy Schools' colleagues and schools were supported to complete the tool. The team are now providing ongoing support to enable schools to complete and deliver action plans to improve emotional health and wellbeing.

Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) Training has been co-ordinated during the Spring Term 2022 to support Flintshire schools. Flintshire Teams were established for Primary and Secondary colleagues to access all the required resources for RSE - including an RSE Audit and curriculum exemplars. This work has prompted the restart of the secondary schools' Healthy Schools and PSE county forum meeting which was suspended during the pandemic.

## **School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP)**

The School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) is a school-based scheme that provides healthy meals, food and nutrition education, physical activity and enrichment sessions to children during the summer holidays. '*Food and Fun*' is the brand identity used at local level to promote the scheme to children and families' which is part funded by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). The aim is to prevent children going hungry in the summer holidays, to improve children's health and promote learning through a programme of enrichment activities.

The Healthy Schools Team have overseen SHEP Food & Fun in Flintshire since it began in 2018 initially with 2 schools. The Team manage all planning and coordination including the steering group, the funding and provide direct support for schools. 2021 was the third year that the programme has been delivered in Flintshire and is the most successful to date, reinforcing the positive impact strong partnership working can have within communities. In 2021, over 160 children and young people aged

5-12 years benefited from SHEP in 6 schools, with over 2000 meals served during the 12 day programme. 9 cohorts have been recruited for the summer programme for 2022.

## **Pupil Voice**

The Council is committed to ensuring that the voices of children and young people are reflected in its work and actively seeks their engagement.

Following the introduction of the Framework on Embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Health and Wellbeing, schools are required to complete an assessment tool and develop an implementation plan based on the outcomes. This includes specific indicators where schools need to demonstrate how the whole school community is engaged and involved in day to day life of the school in influencing decision making and reviewing progress.

As part of the statutory processes in the identification of additional learning needs, children and young people are actively supported to contribute as appropriate to their age or stage of development. Youth Justice assessments and plans clearly reference the views and needs of the young person themselves and the Integrated Youth Provision regularly consults with its users and refines its services as a result. A Youth Council is in place and meets regularly. It has the opportunity to also meet formally with the Chief Executive, Leader of the Council and Chief Officer for Education & Youth.

Any proposals for school organisation change include a young person's version of key documentation and council staff facilitate consultations sessions with learners as part of the statutory process and report on their feedback in reports to decision makers.

The Healthy Schools Scheme requires schools to demonstrate their commitment to pupil participation in core areas of school life which directly affect the health and well-being of children and young people including teaching and learning; environment and pastoral care. Schools can evidence how they meet the requirements of the Welsh Government Guidance for Governing Bodies on the Establishment and Operation of School Councils Circular No: 42/2006 23 October 2006. Schools use a variety of forums to ensure young peoples' views are listened to and that they receive feedback about what has happened to their views.

The Healthy Schools team have led on the Portfolio's contribution to the corporate Climate Change Strategy. Young people's engagement activities have been developed in order to establish the views of young people as part of the Council's strategy.

As part of the Period Dignity Grant the Portfolio launched a home subscription service for products to be delivered to home addresses of children and young people directly with a suitable provider. Training has been provided for schools and this has been linked to the work for RSE. A survey of users of this service was very positive with 96% agreeing the products were delivered in discreet packaging; 92% of responders saying they would recommend the providers' sanitary products to others and 91% of responders would consider using the provider again.

Engagement with schools and promotion of the School Health Research Network (SHRN) Survey was conducted during the autumn term 2021. In total, 7537 young people from Flintshire took part which is an increase from the previous surveys - 6585 in 2017 and 6773 in 2019. The biggest increase this year has been across years 10 and 11. The Healthy Schools Team work with schools to ensure that the data from this survey, which clearly reflects young people's voices, is used to create school action plans to ensure positive change is achieved.

Sport Wales has coordinated the School Sport Survey for learners in Years 3 to 11 for over twenty years. All schools which collect the required number of survey responses from their learners receive unweighted results in a school report and providing enough schools have participated, the local

authority also qualify for a report. The numbers of learners that have completed the survey has steadily increased from 5090 in 2015, 5208 in 2017, and 5212 responses in 2022. This year 3052 secondary aged learners from 8 secondary schools completed the survey alongside 2160 primary aged learners from 25 primary schools. Schools, supported by the Portfolio, will be expected to share their reports with their School Councils and use the information to secure further improvements in sports and physical activities within their schools.

### **School Place Planning & Provision including provision for Welsh medium & admissions processes**

Flintshire County Council has a strong track record in strategically managing its school estate through both its own resources and through the effective use of grant funding schemes e.g. Sustainable Learning Communities Programme in order to manage effective and efficient delivery of school places. It has demonstrated a willingness to take difficult decisions to modernise the school network to improve the quality of the learning environment to underpin teaching and learning and address issues related to condition and suitability within its school estate.

Under its School Modernisation Strategy the Council has undertaken a major programme of school organisational change proposals which have included the closure of one nursery school, three primary schools, one secondary school, the development of four federal arrangements across the primary and secondary sector, the amalgamation of all infant and junior schools, the rationalisation of post-16 provision in the north of the County resulting in a partnership arrangement with Coleg Cambria, the extension of primary Welsh medium provision, the building of two new primary schools and an award winning 3-16 learning campus and other major remodelling projects. The Sustainable Learning Communities Band A Programme has now been fully completed (on time and within budget) bringing the total investment envelope to £64.2m for this phase of investment.

The Council's Strategic Outline Plan (SOP) for Band B is equally ambitious at £85m and has approval from Welsh Government and the Council's Cabinet. The Council is constantly evaluating its programme priorities and how to use the differing forms of funding available e.g. Capital and Revenue based funding under the Mutual Investment Model (MIM).

The proposed programme provides efficient and effective educational infrastructure to meet current and future demand. The programme has potential to remove up to 10 educational buildings from the service portfolio and ensure suitable investment in new facilities. All projects within the programme will be designed to promote, where applicable, early years' provision and community access to school and sports facilities.

The backlog maintenance for projects within the programme is £7,732,996 for secondary and £1,692,356 for primary. For new school projects the Council would expect to achieve 100% reduction in backlog maintenance, for large remodelling projects an 80% reduction and smaller scale projects the aim would be for 50% as a benchmark. The Council has clearly defined arrangements for repairs and maintenance of schools and responds appropriately to emergencies.

The SOP is linked to the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. The Band B programme is focused on 3 of the 6 schools within the Welsh Medium (WM) sector, linking in with the Council's desire to ensure that WM is given priority and linking into the National Welsh Language Strategy. Further funding opportunities have been identified and secured to build a new start up Welsh Medium Primary school in an area of known Welsh medium demand.

Voluntary Aided schools are maintained jointly by the County Council and either the Church in Wales or the Roman Catholic Church. Aided schools also have access to separate capital funding streams

directly through the Welsh Government. The Council continues to work successfully in partnership with the Diocesan Authorities to ensure that Aided schools are appropriately located and fit for purpose.

In September 2021 the Pupil Level Annual School Census showed the 64 primary schools had a total capacity of 14059 full time places and had 11,807 total numbers on roll (NOR), which is a surplus of 16.02% . 11 Schools in the secondary sector had a total capacity of 10,718 with 9658 NOR and 9.89% surplus places. When combined, these figures equate to 13.4% average surplus places across the school network, which is higher than the maximum national target of 10%.

Unfilled places at September 2021 were 3,312, this is an improvement on statistics produced in January 2013, when there were some 4,000 (15.4 per cent) unfilled places in Flintshire schools distributed across primary and secondary schools. The proposals contained within the SOP for the Band B 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools investment programme should they be implemented, will reduce unfilled places in schools to near the national target.

Pupil number projections methodology are aligned with other authorities across the region and are completed twice per year, these are linked to school data returns, namely, January PLASC and September PLASC returns. The capacity assessments are conducted using the Welsh Government's Measuring the capacity of schools in Wales methodology and are audited once per year.

The Council has an up-to-date Asset Management system and data from the system is used to influence decision making on capital investment in the school network. Priorities for investment for the schools capital programme are clear, linked to the School Modernisation Strategy and are funded and based upon up-to-date information.

In 2016/17 suitability surveys were commissioned and conducted across the schools' portfolio based on national guidance. Despite the significant investment through 21st Century Schools programme and the Council's own capital programme, it is estimated that an investment in excess of £130m is still required to address suitability issues across the schools network.

*Table 11: Suitability of Primary and Secondary School Buildings*

Suitability Grade	No of Schools	Percentage %
A	11	14.66%
B	24	30.66%
C	37	50.66%
D	3	4%

School condition surveys are re-assessed in line with national asset management guidance on a five year cycle, with the repair & maintenance (R&M) backlog estimated in excess of £12m, a substantial improvement from the £35m backlog reported in the 2010 SOP.

*Table 12: Condition of Primary and Secondary School Buildings*

Condition Grade	No of Schools	Percentage %
A	4	5.34%
B	62	82.66%
C	9	12%
D	0	0.00%

Flintshire County Council has no schools in condition 'D' as this would mean that the school building life would have expired or be at risk of imminent failure.

The Council consults with children and young people, parents, school governors and staff and other relevant stakeholders prior to making proposals for any school modernisation change. The consultation process involves the completion and presentation of impact assessments around community, transport, buildings, equalities and language and includes a financial appraisal.

The responses from each formal consultation process is presented to the Council's Cabinet, along with the impact assessment, options appraisal and officer recommendations. Cabinet then decide on how to progress. For all construction projects the Head Teacher or nominated person from School forms part of the "operational team".

Flintshire consults other admission authorities and coordinates admission arrangements with neighbouring authorities, including common dates of return and common offer dates. Flintshire participates in the regional North Wales Admissions Group to coordinate admissions arrangements and develop/deliver joint training. The Council is represented at the ADEW School Admissions Officers' Group and is aware of national and Welsh Government initiatives in the service.

The composite prospectus, "Guide to Education Services" is reviewed and published annually and is made available on line to all parents on 1<sup>st</sup> September each year, as part of the annual admissions round. Feedback from Welsh Government on the composite prospectus has been incorporated in to the Guide.

The vast majority of parental preferences continue to be met (96%). All appeals are held before the end of the academic year and any appeals outside the timetabled admissions process are heard well within 30 school days in accordance with the School Appeals Code. Panel members are trained in accordance with the Appeals Code, and advertising, recruitment and training of panel members takes place every 3 years jointly with other admission authorities. This is a cost effective way of managing recruitment and training and ensures consistency across the region.

Applications for mid-term transfers are made online and every effort is made to process the application to admit pupils within 10 school days. Flintshire's Managed Moves Protocol has been revised recently and agreed with all head teachers.

### **Music Services for Schools**

Music services for Flintshire schools are now delivered by Theatr Clwyd Music which was established in 2020 when Theatr Clwyd adopted the Flintshire Music Service to ensure this discretionary service was protected in the face of significant financial challenges for the Council. Flintshire pupils continue to have access to high quality individual, group and whole class music tuition. Learners have the opportunity to undertake music examinations and progress to county ensembles and national music groups. The Council works in partnership with the Theatr Clwyd Music Trust to maximise the impact of new national funding for music services provided by Welsh Government via the Welsh Local Government Association.

## **2. Quality of Education Services Areas Summary**

<b>Areas for ongoing improvement &amp; sustainability</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Further develop, strengthen and embed peer working between schools to share best practice and raise standards for all</li><li>• Continue to support schools with the implementation of ALNET</li><li>• Continue to support schools and services to increase their digital offer for children and young people</li><li>• Increase access to education, employment and training for young people in the YJS</li></ul>

- Consolidate the outreach support and training for schools provided by Plas Derwen (PRU)
- Continue to strengthen links between the Portfolio and its secondary schools with the North Wales Economic Ambition Board to maximise learner access to apprenticeships and employment opportunities through the 14-19 strategy
- Continue to improve the school estate through the school modernisation and capital investment strategy
- Expand the Adult Learning Offer and develop systems for monitoring and evaluating progression
- Implement the Year 1 action plan from the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan
- Roll out the National Framework for embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional Health and Wellbeing
- Improve provision for children with Autism
- Refresh and embed the strategy for Youth Service provision
- Continue to work collectively across schools and council services to mitigate the impacts of poverty and reduce inequality.
-

## **INSPECTION AREA 3: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers**

The Council benefits from strong leadership with an effective working relationship between professional officers and elected members, led by the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council. This is demonstrated through the portfolio structure within the Council where Cabinet Lead Members and Chief Officers work closely together to successfully achieve corporate priorities. This is exemplified in key documents such as the Council Plan and Well-Being Plan which are focused on improving outcomes for Flintshire communities and their residents, including children and young people.

Programme Boards are in place for each portfolio and are attended by the Chief Executive, Leader of the Council, designated Cabinet Members, Chief Officer and senior managers. The Education and Youth Programme Board provides a purposeful platform for developing the strategic direction of the portfolio, informs policy development and ensures performance oversight. A robust and transparent scrutiny process ensures that there is continuous challenge of performance and evaluation of impact. Cabinet reports, Overview & Scrutiny reports, performance monitoring reports and risk registers are jointly owned by members and officers.

The leadership structure and hierarchy of accountability within the Council, both from an elected member and an officer perspective, is clearly articulated and understood. Roles and responsibilities are clearly documented and there is a constructive working relationship between officers and members that delivers an appropriate level of challenge to the work of the portfolio to ensure the best outcomes for learners but also ensures that positive impacts and successes are celebrated.

Professional and political leadership is used effectively to manage the Council's core business of providing quality and responsive public services in the face of long-term austerity, the impacts of the Covid pandemic and challenging budget settlements year on year. This has been clearly demonstrated by the collective problem solving by senior officers and elected members in managing the Council's financial strategy and achieving legally balanced budgets whilst protecting and sustaining services. Financial planning processes are robust with high levels of scrutiny and assurance. Officer and elected members have a track record of working together constructively and with clear purpose on difficult issues. This has been reflected in decisions taken e.g. the management of the school estate and the additional financial support provided for services supporting pupils with Additional Learning Needs and deficit budgets in secondary schools.

The Council's management of services and the support provided to its residents, its strategic partners and to its schools during the COVID -19 pandemic, especially in the emergency phase of the response, was exemplary. The emergency command structure, led by the Chief Executive and ably support by Chief Officers and senior managers across the Council ensured that appropriate decisions were made quickly to protect the public and reshape services. This included the delivery of an effective network of childcare hubs when statutory education was suspended, followed by the reintroduction of education services when schools were able to reopen. Alongside this the Council supported the rapid development of digital learning platforms in schools to ensure continuity of learning with effective distribution of digital and Wi-Fi devices to those in need. The provision of free school meals via its catering partner, NEWydd, subsequently replaced by a system of direct payments, ensured that vulnerable families received their entitlement. Senior officers provided schools and settings with clear guidance and support to develop robust COVID-19 risk assessments and COVID-19 safe working

practices to enable the safe, ongoing delivery of education throughout the pandemic. Officers and school leaders responded to regular changes in Welsh Government legislation and Public Health Wales advice and worked closely alongside the Test, Trace and Protect Service.

The Council's approach to strategic leadership is underpinned by public service values. Within the context of delivery of services to children and young people there is a moral commitment to delivery in an inclusive, nurturing and worthwhile way which enables them to successfully embrace adult life and become responsible, independent, economically active and resilient citizens. This is clearly reflected in the structure and priorities of the Council Plan which reflect the Welsh Government's Ways of Working (Sustainable Development) Principles and the Well-being Goals of the Future Generations (Wales) Act and focus on six core areas :

- Poverty
- Affordable and Accessible Housing
- Green Society and Environment
- Economy
- Personal and Community Wellbeing
- Education and Skills

The Council has a good track record of communicating with residents, service users, its workforce and wider stakeholders through external and internal processes. There is a strong culture of engagement and inclusivity when agreeing priorities. An example of this is the Council's post-Covid recovery plan and Wellbeing Assessment and Action plan and in its work through the Public Service Board. What matters to communities is integral to priority setting and resource allocation. From an educational perspective this can be seen in its engagement work around the budget settlement for schools, in its consultations around school organisational change, in the School Health Research Network surveys and action plans and in other key areas e.g. youth service provision, play and childcare sufficiency.

The Council is proactive in making difficult decisions and where needed, the professional and political leadership intervene effectively to overcome obstacles. Systems leadership and the delegation of resources support the efforts to place the learner first and protect the quality of education and support services. This has been exemplified in the work by all officers and elected members to set legally balanced budgets in the face of significant financial challenge. Despite these financial challenges, delegation rates to schools to protect front line services are above the Welsh average and additional funding to protect schools' budgets are channeled in wherever possible. The Council has made considerable progress in reducing the number of schools in a deficit position, a recommendation from the inspection of its education services in 2019, by targeting additional financial resources for secondary schools despite the overall challenging financial context.

Across all education services commissioned by the Council over the value of £25k, social value is considered and included as a key priority. Social value is separately weighted during the procurement process, and supply chain partners are expected to monitor and report against the generation of localised social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being outcomes, in order to evidence value for money and social return on investment. A significant amount of social value is generated through education services including; the creation of local employment and training opportunities, retention of local people in employment, employee upskilling, growth of the local economy through a commitment to local spend, investment in local community needs projects, increased engagement with local schools through investment and volunteer time to assist in the delivery of the Curriculum for Wales, and waste reduction through implementing circular economy solutions to reduce, reuse and recycle waste. Two

recent school capital projects at Ysgol Brynford and Ysgol Castell Alun achieved £968k in social value outcomes.

There is strong corporate and political support for Education and Youth Services across the Council. Political and officer leadership of Education is innovative and pragmatic. Education priorities are exemplified in corporate and portfolio level plans and are regularly scrutinised through the quarterly monitoring reports presented to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees. The annual performance report for the period 2021 – 2022 identified no performance indicators (PIs) showing a red RAG status for current performance against target and no measures off track, with 86% of outcomes on track (Green RAG) and only 14% of outcomes requiring monitoring (Amber RAG). The positive impact of this approach has been that the needs and priorities of pupils have been consistently supported both by officers and elected members. Overall this has delivered consistently good outcomes for children and young people and this is reflected that at the end of the performance monitoring cycle for 2021-22, no Flintshire school was in any category of follow up by Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales, Estyn.

Elected members effectively undertake their statutory duties and make a worthwhile contribution to the development and progress of statutory plans. They also show real commitment to safeguarding the welfare of vulnerable learners. There is strong member engagement in the following areas relevant to children and young people:

- The Welsh in Education Forum
- The Corporate Parenting Forum
- The Corporate Safeguarding Panel
- The Schools Standards Quality Board
- The Youth Justice Executive Board
- The Education Consultative Committee
- SACRE
- School Budget Forum
- Regional School Improvement (GwE) Joint Committee

Senior leaders and managers communicate high expectations for securing improvement and challenge schools to good effect through a range of forums. For school improvement these include regular meetings with the head teacher community, working through nominated representatives on the primary and secondary Head Teacher Federations, School Performance Monitoring Group and other specific groups e.g. Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator Forum, County Curriculum Steering Group and Emotional Health and Well-Being Strategy Group, Digital Advisory Group and Welsh in Education Strategic Forum. There is also effective monitoring and challenge for other areas of provision through the Youth Justice Executive Board, Children's Services Forum and the Corporate Safeguarding Panel. The key objectives of the Public Service Board are clearly aligned with the Council's and Portfolio's strategic improvement plans.

The Council and its partners have a clear commitment to learners and to developing a learning culture in the county, from early years to adulthood. They understand the impact of national and regional priorities and how this impacts on decision making locally for services e.g. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, Education in Wales - Our National Mission, Cymraeg 2050 – Welsh Language Strategy and the North Wales Economic Growth Deal.

Whilst a lean team in terms of personnel, senior leaders in the Education Portfolio work in a collegiate way with a range of strategic partners across public services to set high level priorities together for the young people of Flintshire. They are well respected by elected members, external partners, regional colleagues and school leaders. There are effective performance management arrangements which bring about improvements. Managers ensure that objectives for individual officers link well to operational and strategic priorities.

The Council works effectively with GwE (Regional School Improvement Service). Since the inception of the service in 2013, there has been a good track record of engagement with the service to support its development and robust scrutiny of the service in holding it accountable for the scope of its delivery on behalf of Flintshire. GwE officers participate fully in Flintshire business and understand and contribute to the vision, aims and objectives of the Council. This is evidenced by the way in which GwE Business Plans support the Portfolio's Business Plan and the Council Plan. Roles and responsibilities of GwE officers in contributing to the delivery of the service within Flintshire are clearly articulated. This mutually supportive, yet challenging culture fostered between GwE and Flintshire officers, helps the Council maintain its focus on outcomes for learners across all phases. The Chief Officer for Education in Flintshire is currently the Lead Director on the GwE Management Board.

The six North Wales local authorities and GwE worked very effectively through the COVID-19 pandemic to support schools and this is reflected in the positive reports authored by Estyn to both the Council and to GwE during the period when statutory inspections were suspended as a result of national lockdowns.

All schools have chosen to access the Human Resources, Employment Services and Occupational Health SLA provision which provides for a range of services to assist them in complying with their 'people related' statutory responsibilities and operational/ business obligations. Customer led solutions manifest themselves in a wide range of service delivery including: model policy and information provision, confidential telephone and face to face support, Heads Federation and cluster group briefings, conference sessions, case conferences and discrete advisory sessions. The take up rates, activity levels and repeat business support consistent 'buy back' levels and evidence that these services are valued and contribute significantly to school performance. Relationships between school leaders and central service providers are very good and the ethos is to support school leaders in their management functions.

Relationships between senior Council officers and trade union representatives are good and there is a high degree of engagement on key issues through the Education Consultative Committee and other statutory groups e.g. School Budget Forum. There is also a good level of informal interaction between the Portfolio's HR officers and local union representatives in individual school processes e.g. redundancy, absence management etc.

### **3.2 Self Evaluation processes and improvement planning**

The Council has a well-established process of evaluation, review and challenge. Leaders, managers and elected members have an accurate understanding of the Council's strengths and weaknesses. They routinely make good use of a range of rigorous monitoring activities.

The Education Portfolio undertakes a wide range of self-evaluation activities, first at a service level analysing any available data and first-hand evidence to make accurate evaluations of the quality and impact of individual services. The arrangements also identify clearly the areas for improvement and help ensure that progress against strategic plans are reviewed effectively and timely interventions

made. This is then fed up into the Portfolio's overall evaluation of its annual Business Plan and into the Portfolio Annual Self Evaluation Report. This then links to the Council Plan which is regularly reviewed by Chief Officers and senior managers and reported on regularly to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees.

Through its joint working with GwE there are clearly defined plans for primary and secondary schools which are agreed between the Chief Education Officer and Senior Manager for School Improvement and GwE Core Lead Officers. Agreed priorities in the business plans are based firmly on the findings of self-evaluation processes within schools. The plans accurately identify key issues and include bespoke improvement plans to address the specific challenges, drawing on the resources of both GwE and the Council's own services. Plans are regularly updated to reflect the outcomes of whole school reviews and support visits commissioned by the Education Portfolio. Progress towards achieving the agreed outcomes are regularly reviewed by the Senior Manager for School Improvement and the GwE Core Leads. This then feeds into termly Quality Board meetings with the Cabinet Member for Education, Chair of Education, Youth and Culture Scrutiny Committee, the Chief Executive and the Chief Officer for Education and Youth. This ensures that strategic leaders are fully informed on school performance in Flintshire.

The Portfolio works swiftly and effectively with GwE Officers to address 'Schools Causing Concern' and 360° support plans are put in place. Where rapid progress in some schools has been required, Accelerated Improvement Boards (AIB) have been used successfully to oversee progress. When deployed, these Boards meet regularly and include key officers of the Portfolio, GwE and school leaders, including governors. Where required, the Chief Officer has used statutory powers of intervention and established Interim Executive Boards (IEB) to replace traditional governance models. This has been successful in improving the pace of improvement in identified schools. GwE senior officers support the IEB alongside senior LA managers. At the current time there are no schools in Flintshire which have either an Accelerated Improvement Board or an Interim Executive Board.

Where it is available, education officers use data effectively to ensure areas for improvement are identified quickly and addressed robustly through detailed business planning. As a result, the quality of information shared within Flintshire is of a high standard, enabling members to scrutinise and challenge progress effectively. With the Welsh Government decision to remove a range of data sets that were traditionally used for accountability purposes, officers of the Local Authority, Elected Members and GwE Officers are in the process of developing other ways to effectively monitor performance and measure progress.

Education officers within the Council focus well on joint planning and resourcing as well as building capacity for continuous improvement. The Portfolio has strong links with the community, has good liaison and communication with schools, engages positively with parents and carers and works effectively with other Council portfolios and external agencies enabling officers to deliver joined-up programmes that improve outcomes and wellbeing for learners. Good examples of this include the statutory processes around provision for children with Additional Learning Needs, the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Steering Group, the Adult Learning Partnership with Wrexham County Borough Council and the Council's delivery of the Summer of Fun and Winter of Wellbeing Programmes.

The Portfolio engages well with partners, service users and other stakeholders in its evaluation processes and in planning for improvement. For example, the Integrated Youth Strategy "Multiplying Impact" featured robust engagement of young people's representatives in its development. Any aspect of school organisational change includes consultation with the children and young people potentially impacted and school leaders are regularly consulted directly or through the Federations on major issues. The Council supports schools to make good use of surveys to improve provision and outcomes e.g. School Health Research Network and Sports Surveys.

The Council uses a corporate database for the recording of complaints, concerns and requests for services. A senior manager within the Portfolio is the link officer for complaints. Parental complaints about schools have to be re-directed back to the individual school to be dealt with via their own complaints procedures. Complainants are advised of the correct procedure and, as necessary, the Portfolio provides support to schools on ensuring its procedures are in line with the national guidance. On-line complaints training is available to all governing bodies. During the period April 2021 to March 2022, there were 8 formal complaints against the Portfolio received via the Council's Complaints process. These were in relation to school admissions, school closure during the pandemic and SEN support. Only one complaint was upheld. There were no complaints in relation to education services in Flintshire investigated by the Ombudsman in 2021-2022.

The Council is compliant with the requirement regarding partnership agreements with its schools.

### **3.3 Professional Learning**

Relationships between the Education Portfolio and schools are strong and productive. Regular head teacher meetings and the partnership groups in the consultative structure form an effective mechanism for raising issues and agreeing actions to tackle them. Flintshire benefits from well-established learning networks within and across schools, and more widely across the region, enabling schools to develop and share their professional knowledge. Working in clusters and alliances has developed well in Flintshire over the last few years with all schools engaging in this co-operative learning approach. Key areas such as Additional Learning Needs, Digital Learning and Welsh Language have all benefitted from a cluster training and support model.

Flintshire schools engage effectively with the range of professional development opportunities provided by GwE and the Council for school leaders, teachers and support staff at all levels. Flintshire staff have access to a comprehensive learning continuum provided by GwE which delivers appropriate training at all stages of professional development, from Newly Qualified Teacher to Executive Headteacher. Data shows that the take up of these opportunities from Flintshire schools is very positive. Staff within the Education Portfolio are able to access professional development opportunities within GwE where appropriate e.g. curriculum reform.

Partnership activities make a strong contribution to widening the range of choices for learners and this has benefits for their standards and wellbeing. The Council takes a leading role in developing joint working practices and promotes trust and good communication between partners. These include effective partnerships between the Council, North Wales Police, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, Youth Justice Board, Coleg Cambria, Wrexham Glyndwr University, Flintshire Local Voluntary Council and other local education authorities.

Partnership working between the Portfolio, further and higher education establishments, employers and secondary schools in developing the work of the 14-19 network is good. They successfully promote co-operation and enable school governors, Coleg Cambria, employers and the Council to plan, monitor and resource an effective 14-19 curriculum that meets the needs of learners.

The Welsh Advisory Team in the Portfolio actively encourages school staff at all levels, including head teachers, to engage in the WG sabbatical training programmes for practitioners who wish to teach through the medium of Welsh or wish to improve their Welsh-language skills. This is a key component of the Council's Welsh in Education Plan which has been approved by Welsh Ministers. Take up across

the different sabbatical options are good and Flintshire staff represent a sizeable proportion of each cohort. This is extending the number of employees with improved Welsh language skills, which is contributing to the improving quality of provision for learners in both English and Welsh medium schools. The manager of the Welsh Advisory Team is a key member of the Regional Welsh Language Board. During the COVID-19 pandemic the Welsh Advisory Team rapidly and successfully adapted their professional learning offer from face to face to digital delivery which was very welcomed by schools.

The professional learning offer supports current school leaders across Flintshire but also invests in developing leaders of the future. Subscription rates to the NPQH and Aspiring Heads courses from Flintshire staff are strong. Newly appointed headteachers are supported through development programmes and are also allocated mentors and leadership coaches.

Networking and peer-to-peer work is a positive feature in Flintshire schools. This collaborative work has led to a shared understanding of what constitutes good leadership. Collaborative practice amongst leaders is reinforced through strategic forums, at both headteacher and deputy level. These forums support strong effective communication and nurture a mutual sense of common responsibility for the development of responses and actions to local and national challenges.

The Council promotes professional learning for its core portfolio team through structured learning opportunities, most visible through the Flintshire Academi Infonet, which provides learning and e-learning modules on leadership and management, personal development, specific professional development, equality and diversity, Welsh language, health and safety and ICT. Education Portfolio staff also access training opportunities offered by GwE e.g. the development of the new curriculum.

The Council has a well-established and successful Trainee (Apprentice scheme). The Council recruit local people every year to undertake work based qualifications. The outcome of the scheme over the last 5 years is very positive with 95% of those undertaking an FCC Apprenticeship achieving good outcomes e.g.

- 75% gaining employment within the Authority after completing the programme
- 15% gaining employment externally
- 5% moving on to Higher Education or other professional training programmes.

All staff benefit from the annual appraisal scheme which ensures personal and professional objectives are linked to the annual corporate service and portfolio plans. Centrally employed teaching staff have statutory performance management. The process enables employees and managers to explore individual strengths and identify wider opportunities for these to be utilised effectively. These opportunities support succession planning at a time where central services remain under pressure from financial and recruitment/retention challenges, particularly post-pandemic and also focus strongly on staff wellbeing.

As part of its People Strategy, the Council takes a proactive approach to talent spotting and succession planning. Senior managers regularly identify officers who have potential and signpost them to learning opportunities to develop their skills. Many officers within the Portfolio have accessed professional development e.g. Institute of Leadership & Management qualifications and NVQs through a partnership arrangement with Coleg Cambria. Senior managers are identified for external learning opportunities through Academi Wales and SOLACE (Chief Executives' professional association).

Senior managers network and share good practice through quarterly Flintshire Academi sessions which not only provide key updates but also are the driver for developing cross-cutting policies and strategies e.g. the Council's People Strategy and Carbon Reduction Strategy. Specifically within the Portfolio, there are termly workshops for service managers to share updates, future plans and engage in consultation and professional development opportunities. There is a comprehensive online training programme available for all staff of the Council to access on corporate training priorities e.g. safeguarding, GDPR, leadership and management etc. Networking by senior managers through representation on various groups of the Association of Directors of Education in Wales ensures service planning is informed by current and best practice from across Wales.

However, in more recent times, and particularly since the pandemic, there have been increasing challenges in recruiting into key posts both in the Education Portfolio and in schools. Educational psychology, youth work, youth justice work and IT systems administration have all experienced difficulties recruiting appropriately qualified staff with adverts having to be go out multiple times and Head teachers are reporting challenges in recruiting skilled classroom support staff as well as key roles such as caretakers. The recruitment difficulties in relation to school cooks, catering staff and cleaners has also had an adverse impact on the Council's key partner, NEWydd, which has sometimes made their service delivery to schools challenging at times.

### **3.4 Safeguarding**

Safeguarding is a corporate priority set out in the annual Council Plan and the Council has robust arrangements in place across all areas. The Corporate Safeguarding Policy provides a framework for all council services to safeguard and protect children and adults, ensuring that all are fully aware of their responsibilities. This policy applies to Flintshire County Council employees, councillors, volunteers and organisations commissioned to provide services on behalf of the Council. Flintshire County Council is a member of the North Wales Safeguarding Children's Board (NWSCB) and North Wales Safeguarding Adults' Board (NWSAB).

The Corporate Safeguarding Panel is well established and includes representation from all portfolios, including Education and Youth, to ensure that all services integrate safeguarding awareness into the way they work. This panel receives information regarding the working practices and procedures of every service in the Council, providing assurance that the services are meeting their duties in accordance with the Corporate Safeguarding Policy and Guidelines and reports to Cabinet on an annual basis.

The Chief Officer for Education and Youth ensures that all the statutory requirements in terms of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults receive due consideration and that effective safeguarding arrangements operate within the Education and Youth portfolio at the three levels of responsibility of strategic, support and operational.

In order to further sharpen the focus on safeguarding, the Education Portfolio has established its own Safeguarding Panel and this is attended by senior managers within Education and from Children's Services. It has clearly defined terms of reference, an action plan and ensures that communication up to, and down from, the Corporate Safeguarding Panel is effective.

The Senior Manager for School Improvement has the lead strategic responsibility for Safeguarding in the Portfolio and is the designated contact for officers and schools. The Learner Adviser for Health, Wellbeing and Safeguarding is the deputy designated contact who provides operational activity support, including attendance at national and regional safeguarding meeting. This officer also co-ordinates training for schools, governors and portfolio staff and provides model policies for schools. There is

effective communication between Education and Youth and other portfolios in the Council as well as with external partners.

The Portfolio has appropriate arrangements for the strategic planning for safeguarding within both the core education service and schools, which includes monitoring. Safeguarding and Child Protection model policies are updated regularly in line with revised national guidance e.g. Keeping Learners Safe and the All Wales Child Protection Procedures. A structured training programme is in place which includes training for Level 3 Designated Safeguarding Leads, Level 2 Safeguarding for Managers and Senior Leaders including lead Governor for Safeguarding and Train the Trainer for Level 1. Basic Safeguarding Awareness and responsibilities of individual staff including governors. Safeguarding basic awareness / updates are also incorporated into termly LA headteacher conferences and into planned LA training programmes for NQTs and new and acting headteachers. In addition, key safeguarding themes are addressed on a rolling programme e.g. Prevent and Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual violence (VAWDASV). There are strong relationships with key local partners including North Wales Police, Hafan Cymru and NSPCC. Between 2020 and 2022, 952 staff accessed safeguarding training across the Education Portfolio and schools despite the challenges of the pandemic. Feedback from Headteachers confirm the training and support for schools is welcomed and effective. Evaluation forms are completed at the end of each training delivery and the information is reviewed on an individual basis in addition to any immediate response that can be implemented. Feedback is also included in the annual report to the North Wales Regional Safeguarding Children's Board.

Support materials and model lessons for teachers at secondary level have been produced to support the delivery of key aspects of Personal & Social Education including Prevent, County Lines and materials for National Safeguarding Week each year. Excellent partnership working with Theatr Clwyd has resulted in a powerful drama workshop for Key Stage 3 pupils on the issue of consent, that has proved highly effective in enhancing pupils' knowledge and skills in keeping themselves safe and encouraged some young people to come forward to request individual support.

The Portfolio and schools operate safe recruitment procedures and make sure that all appropriate checks are carried out. All schools are routinely reminded of their responsibilities under Section 28 of the Children Act and as outlined in the Welsh Government guidance - Keeping Learners Safe. There is regular monitoring activity through audit procedures. Schools have been provided with a model annual monitoring report for school leaders to use to report to their governing bodies and the LA on safeguarding matters. The Strategic Lead for safeguarding works in partnership with managers from Social Services and the Human Resources team effectively in the event of allegations against members of staff from schools.

Online safety is an area regularly considered by the Education, Youth and Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The Council actively encourages all schools to use the 360° Safe Cymru Tool and the All Wales School Liaison Core Programme. The IT Service Level Agreement provides for web filtering in schools.

### **3.5 Use of resources**

Flintshire's response to funding reductions in recent years has been measured and appropriate. The Council has adopted a systematic approach to ensure that efficiencies are secured across all services and the organisation has embraced alternative models of delivery where appropriate. There are plenty of examples of good practice and innovation within the Council.

Education reform and investment has remained a priority for the Council despite the challenging financial climate. The high strategic priority given to the education service is reflected in the Council's

allocation of both revenue and capital resources. The schools' delegated budgets have been protected from efficiency reductions in recent years and elected members across the Council have directed additional funding streams to schools when they have become available. Risks related to the impact of poor funding on the quality of education services have been clearly set out and are understood by elected members and head teachers. The Council reviews the outcomes of its financial plans to make sure that funding is spent wisely and has a positive impact on standards.

The school funding formula is regularly reviewed in consultation with schools and reported to the School Budget Forum. Staffing, accommodation and financial resources are effectively managed and deployed to support learning and improvement. Partnership activity provides good value for money because it contributes to extensive opportunities and improved outcomes for learners in aspects which the Council and its schools alone could not provide.

The Council is committed to an ambitious school modernisation investment programme by maximising Welsh Government's Sustainable Learning Communities funding (previously 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools) and its own capital funding. Flintshire is also a Pathfinder Council for the new Mutual Investment Model created by Welsh Government to deliver a new 3-16 learning campus in Mynydd Isa which will be the first net zero carbon school both in construction and in operation in Wales. The Council has also secured funding in recent times through Welsh Government's additional grant funding streams for Small and Rural Schools Infant Class Sizes, Welsh Medium, Childcare, Community Learning and Community Facilities. The Council has a positive reputation for delivering quality projects on time and within budget.

The Council currently has an estimated Repair & Maintenance (R&M) of approximately £12m, which is a substantial improvement from the £35m backlog reported in the 2010 Strategic Outline Programme and has been achieved through targeted capital investment. However, the level of R&M remains a risk and is strategically linked to the Band B of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme.

In response to a recommendation in its Estyn inspection of 2019, the Council has made significant progress in reducing the number of schools in deficit. It has refreshed its policy for the management and monitoring of schools deficits which is robustly applied. There are effective working relationships between senior council officers and school leaders to ensure an appropriate level of both challenge and support to control spending and reduce deficits in schools. The Council has been proactive in providing additional financial resources for secondary schools despite the ongoing challenges of setting a legally balanced budget and this has been targeted to ensure that those in greatest need receive the most support. Schools budgets have also benefitted from additional Welsh Government funding as a result of the pandemic and from periods of statutory closure. Where balances are above the recommended levels, schools are required to submit spending plans to clearly demonstrate how resources are being invested appropriately for the benefit of current learners. An annual report on school balances is presented to the Council's Cabinet and Audit & Governance Committee for member scrutiny.

Many grant funded initiatives track the progress of learners and service users and their families effectively, e.g. Families First, Flying Start, Community Focused Schools, Youth Justice Grant and Youth Support Grant. In the best examples, early bespoke interventions with families make measurable contributions to improved educational outcomes. However, late notification of grant funding and associated conditions can make it difficult for officers to plan. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence that grant funding is maximised to support strategic priorities and deliver quality services and drive positive change. The more recent move by Welsh Government to move to three year indicative budgets however, is helpful and will allow for more strategic planning across the Council.

There are detailed and rigorous financial management processes across the Council and regular reviews of portfolio budgets to ensure value for money and the identification of efficiencies. Cost pressures and other financial risks e.g. price volatility and inflation, are closely monitored. The Education and Youth Portfolio has delivered almost £2.5m of efficiencies through the business planning process over the last seven years which represents an average of 4% of the annual core portfolio budget each year during that period. These efficiencies have been achieved whilst ensuring high quality services continue to meet need. Through regular portfolio budget management processes, senior managers take responsibility for their services budgets, well supported by the corporate finance team.

With a significant proportion of its budget used to commission the regional school improvement service, it is important that the Council is reassured that GwE has effective financial management processes in place. Communication and consultation about financial arrangements are effective with both core funding and grant-expenditure kept under regular review by GwE, the host local authority and the Joint Committee. Detailed work has been undertaken to align grant allocations with priorities. Supporting Improvement Advisers challenge schools on their use of grant funding. This has closed the inconsistencies between schools around identifying the impact of the use of grant funding on pupil outcomes.

Overall, the Council's education services, including schools, continue to provide good value for money.

### **3. Leadership & Management Summary**

<b>Areas for ongoing improvement &amp; sustainability</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maintain rigorous budgetary monitoring and management processes to protect the sustainability of Council funding in challenging financial times to ensure the delivery of quality education services.</li><li>• Maintain the effective monitoring and governance of the education service to ensure continuous school improvement and the best impact for learners.</li><li>• Continue to develop effective partnerships to deliver services in an integrated and cost efficient manner.</li><li>• Continue to improve the school estate through the School Modernisation Strategy and the maximisation of Welsh Government funding streams.</li><li>• Continue to support the professional development of staff in schools and in the Council to mitigate recruitment and retention challenges post pandemic.</li></ul>

