

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
14 SEPTEMBER 2023

Minutes of the remote meeting of the Education, Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Thursday 14 September 2023.

PRESENT: Councillor Teresa Carberry (Chair)

Councillors: Bill Crease, Paul Cunningham, Gladys Healey, Dave Mackie, Gina Maddison, Ryan McKeown, Carolyn Preece, David Richardson, Jason Shallcross and Arnold Woolley

CO-OPTEEs: Lynne Bartlett and Wendy White

SUBSTITUTE: Councillor Hilary McGuill (for Councillor Andrew Parkhurst)

APOLOGIES: Leader of the Council,
Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure,
Senior Manager (School Improvement),
Senior Manager (Youth Justice and Flintshire Sorted),
Senior Manager (Integrated Youth Provision)

CONTRIBUTORS:

Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure,
Cabinet Member for Social Services and Wellbeing
Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
Strategic Finance Manager (for minute number 23)
GwE Officers: Phil McTague (Secondary Core Lead) Bryn Jones and David Edwards
(Primary Core Leads) (for minute number 24)
Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) (for minute number 25)
Senior Manager (Business Support Services) (for minute number 25)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officers

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Councillor Hilary McGuill declared a personal interest as her daughter was a teacher in Flintshire.

21. MINUTES

29 June, 2023

The minutes of the joint meeting with the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on the 29 June 2023 were presented for approval.

The Chair referred to the information requested by Councillor Hilary McGuill regarding the four children who were not in Education, Employment or Training and Councillor McGuill confirmed that the information had been circulated to Members via e-mail.

The minutes of the joint meeting were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillor Hilary McGuill and Councillor Carolyn Preece.

13 July, 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on the 13 July 2023 were presented for approval.

Councillor Hilary McGuill referred to the consultation undertaken by NEWydd on the new menu with pupils and asked if an update could be provided following half term to include feedback from the pupils who had sampled the menu. The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) suggested that a briefing note on how the menu was being received by pupils be included on the forward Work Programme for the 30 November meeting.

The minutes of the meeting were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey and Councillor Hilary McGuill.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 29 June and 13 July, 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

22. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

In presenting the report, the Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator outlined the items being presented to the forthcoming meetings which were attached at Appendix 1 and reported that an additional item on the consultation of Member Role Descriptions would be presented to the next meeting on 19 October 2023. She also reported that an all Members workshop on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) had been arranged for the beginning of October and that confirmation of the dates and times would be sent to Members in due course.

Referring to the Action Tracking report at Appendix 2, the Facilitator confirmed that the first meeting of the School Parking Task & Finish Group was scheduled for Tuesday 19 September to consider and agree the Terms of Reference for the Group. Once agreed this would be shared with both the Environment & Economy and Education Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committees. All other actions were completed.

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) suggested that the following reports be added to the Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the 1 February 2024 meeting:-

- Overview of summer A level and GCSE results following verification in December 2023; and
- Revision of Post 16 Strategy – to outline how the new national commission was developing.

Councillor Hilary McGuill referred to the statement issued by Townlynx and the possible disruption to part of the school bus service. Whilst she recognised that they had since reassured members of the public that changes to the service were not being implemented, she sought reassurance from the Council on what risk assessments were carried out if something similar was to happen again. The Chief Officer explained that it was her colleagues in Streetscene and Transportation who delivered school transport and therefore this matter would come under the remit of the Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee. She advised that the Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) had this matter included on the risk register for the school bus service and paid tribute to colleagues within the service who had worked tremendously hard to find alternative transport solutions for 1100 children. She was pleased that the matter had been resolved and that the bus service continued to be running.

In relation to risk assessments, Councillor Dave Mackie referred to a water main burst in Ewloe which had resulted in the schools in the area running out of water. He was concerned that the water company had not contacted the Council or schools to provide guidance/information on this matter. In response, the Chief Officer agreed to feedback the comments made by Councillor Mackie to the Emergency Management Team. The Chief Executive explained that matters of this nature were considered through contingency planning and were dealt with locally through the Emergency Management Response Team. He suggested that information on the Emergency Management Response Team be provided to the Committee in order to better understand the process. The Chair suggested that this be provided at a County Council meeting in order for all Members to understand the process. The Chief Executive agreed to consider how this information would be shared with all Members.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved by Councillor Carolyn Preece and seconded by Councillor David Richardson.

It was agreed that the two reports suggested by the Chief Officer be included on the FWP and would be picked up as actions arising from the meeting, together with the circulation of information on the Emergency Management Response Team.

RESOLVED:

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

23. CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chair announced that there would be a change to the order of business and that agenda item number 6 would be considered before agenda item number 5.

24. SCHOOL RESERVES YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2023

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) introduced the report and thanked the Strategic Finance Manager for the work undertaken in bringing the report together which would also be presented to the Governance and Audit Committee and School Budget Forum. The report had also been shared with all Head Teachers.

Prior to presenting the report, the Strategic Finance Manager referred to table 3 shown in the report and advised that a revised version had been circulated to the Committee ahead of the meeting. This report had been expanded to include the first six months of the current financial year to provide an outline of the current situation in schools and the Strategic Finance Manager highlighted the budget reduction of 3% on top of inflationary increases to schools in the current financial year. The first part of the report outlined the situation with regard to reserves with Table 1 highlighting the reserves as at the end of the financial year 2022/23 compared with 2021/22. Information was provided on the impacts on primary, secondary and specialist school budgets with a fall from £12.5m to £7m with the appendix highlighting the percentages on a school-by-school basis.

The Strategic Finance Manager referred to Table 2 which highlighted how the reserves had moved over the last five financial years. There were concerns with regard to the resilience of the secondary sector when managing unforeseen circumstances, such as long-term absence and the impacts that this would have on the level of reserves held. The report also provided an analysis for the primary sector with six primary schools in negative reserves at the end of last year, with three which were fairly minor, but the other three were significant.

The Strategic Finance Manager confirmed that all schools had submitted their 2023/24 budget plans which had highlighted an increase in requests for support from the Finance Team, HR colleagues and colleagues in School Improvement. There had been higher levels of voluntary redundancies, and this information was included at Table 5 of the report. The Annual Workforce Census which would be carried out in November would provide a better understanding of the current situation, but it was felt the situation with regard to redundancy was not over yet as schools were using their reserves to manage this year with risks in 2023/24 or 2024/25. Table 6 within the report provided an estimate of the positions across all schools and an overview of the forecast information compared with last year was given.

The Chair commented that challenging times remained with an overall reduction in school reserves and felt that the report clearly highlighted the position with schools. She thanked Head Teachers and governing bodies for their work in striving to reduce costs and completely understood their reasons for speaking to the Council and GwE for help and assistance.

In response to a question from Councillor Gladys Healey on the allocation of school budgets, the Strategic Finance Manager explained that schools funding for the financial year was formulated after the Council had set its budget in mid-February. With regarding to funding for pay awards it was explained that an estimate of the funding was set aside as the teacher pay award and the support staff pay awards were not known in April 2023. The Council had budgeted for the cost, but these had not been

allocated through the funding formula until confirmation had been received with schools incurring the costs. This had worked well previously as schools had received the amount of the pay awards and not an estimate. The Chief Officer confirmed that schools agreed with this understanding that the money would be released into their budgets when the awards were settled and finalised. Communication with Head Teachers and governing bodies continued until the pay awards were settled.

In response to a question on school reserves the Chief Officer clarified that no school should be in detriment. The Strategic Finance Manager commented that schools should not be using reserves to fund pay awards as the risk was held centrally. As soon as the September pay award was confirmed with the Council receiving the Teacher Pay and Conditions document, the Teachers' pay would go up and the funding would be transferred to schools to cover that amount.

The Chief Officer appreciated the challenging year that Head Teachers and Governing Bodies had experienced. The commitment had been given the same as last year that as the budget for 2024/25 progressed that open and effective communication would continue with Head Teachers to keep them updated of the discussions being held prior to obtaining the legal and balanced budget in February.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved by Councillor Arnold Woolley and seconded by Councillor Hilary McGill.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the level of school reserves as at the 31 March 2023, and overview of schools' current financial position.

25. ANNUAL REPORT FROM REGIONAL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT SERVICE, GwE

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) introduced the report which provided a detailed overview of the work of the Regional School Improvement Service with Flintshire schools during the academic year 2022 -2023.

The report identified that there was a strong relationship between Flintshire County Council and the Regional School Effectiveness Service (GwE). There were robust procedures in place for setting a direction and holding the regional service to account. The specific roles of the Local Authority and the regional school improvement service in school improvement were explicit and clear to all stakeholders and they were effectively held to account by local scrutiny procedures.

The Chief Officer invited Mr. Phil McTague, Mr. Bryn Jones and Mr. David Edwards from GwE to further present the report.

Mr. Phil McTague (Secondary Core Lead) in presenting the report, explained that the service had moved forward from the pandemic to redesigning the Curriculum. He provided details of the four key areas, in relation to secondary schools, as follows:-

Key Area 1 – Improving Leadership

Key Area 2 – Improving Teaching and Learning

Key Area 3 – Curriculum and Provision
Key Area 4 – Learner Progress and Standards

Mr. McTague drew Members attention to Appendix 1 of the report which provided a concise summary of the four key areas for secondary schools. He commented that improving leadership in schools was essential to the growth of any school and outlined changes in headship and challenges being faced by secondary schools across Flintshire. Information was provided on the headship profile, and it was confirmed that regular meetings were held to improve the quality of leadership with robust self-evaluation systems which were internal, service led, Local Authority informed but were now nationally profiled through the School Improvement Framework.

An overview of data planning in secondary schools was provided with the majority of schools having clear self-evaluation processes in place especially with training provided on improvement planning. Information on the targeted support plans in place for performance management in secondary schools was provided. An outline of the lessons which had been observed in schools and sixth form was provided together with an overview of the areas for the development required for the coming year.

Mr. McTague referred to the Curriculum and explained that all senior leaders in secondary schools were working hard in consolidating the vision for the design of the Curriculum, recognising strengths and working with stakeholders. All Flintshire schools were involved in alliances with other schools and an outline of the benefits was given and would become a part of the improvement framework moving forward. There were areas to address such as to continue to work on the transition and consistent approaches from years 5 to 8, to continue to hold meetings with the alliances that had been established so good practice could be shared and that GwE and Flintshire continued to work alongside schools to development assessment approaches and processes to track pupils in line with Curriculum changes.

Referring to Learner progress and standards it was explained that in most schools' pupils listen, showed respect to teachers and each other. The vast majority of lessons were delivered in a productive, structured environment with an eagerness to contribute to class discussions. Pupils were able to offer meaningful and in-depth verbal responses with a wide vocabulary used.

Mr. Bryn Jones and Mr. David Edwards (Primary Core Leads) drew Members attention to Appendix 2 of the report which provided a concise summary of the four key areas for primary schools. With regard to the primary sector an overview of the improving leadership across Flintshire schools was given together with information on the National Leadership programmes. School leaders were supported through the 360 degree plans, the School Partnership Programme and collaboration with secondary schools within cluster meetings. It was explained that when self-evaluation was effectively taking place in a holistic manner this linked improvement planning which then linked to support to address identified areas.

Mr. Jones referred to the 12 pedagogical principles which were embedded across Flintshire primary schools and further information was provided on this. Referring to areas of improvements, an overview of the in-school variants was provided together with the links to leadership in developing Welsh across the authority.

Information was also given on the Curriculum provision provided within primary schools together with information on the work undertaken post covid in schools to drive standards for pupil wellbeing and independence to facilitate good progress in learning.

The Chair commented that having read the report she felt the education workforce at all levels remained interested in honing their skills and expertise by undertaking continual professional development (CPD). She was pleased that continual professional development was provided as it demonstrated that they were valued and were interested in their wellbeing, developing their skills and their careers. She was also mindful of the effective checks and balances which quickly picked up concerns at individual and whole school levels.

Councillor Paul Cunningham welcomed the report which he felt highlighted the work being undertaken and showed that school staff were keen to develop their education to enhance their work strengths and strategies. Councillor Carolyn Preece supported the comments made by Councillor Cunningham and congratulated the portfolio and the team but said that there was always room for improvement.

In response to a question from Councillor Gladys Healey on assessments and statement for additional learning need, the Chief Officer confirmed that teachers were constantly assessing pupils with regard to their knowledge and understanding of concepts and skills. For those children who were having difficulties and not progressing there were well established processes to ensure that appropriate provision was put in place.

The Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) reassured the Committee that the new Additional Learning Needs Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (ALNET) legislation would reduce the timescales from 26 weeks. Under ALNET schools were able to undertake this process as soon as a child was potentially identified as having additional learning need. This could be a parent, health professional or someone at the school and the assessment would start from this point. Training had been provided in schools with regard to their roles within ALNET with the timescales changed to ensure that pupils were not waiting too long for an assessment and to have their needs met.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services and Wellbeing commented that schools considered the wellbeing of all children across the Curriculum and cared about the child and the family. She was glad to see that mention was made of the Quiet Place and PGD funding which was put to good use in all schools. Schools should be celebrated for the work that they had undertaken with pupils in schools around well-being and safeguarding.

In response to a question from Councillor Dave Mackie on training courses, the Chief Officer explained that there had been an appendix which had not been attached to the report which provided training statistics and suggested that this be circulated to the Committee following the meeting. She felt that this report and the Self Evaluation Report provided reassurance that there was a very high degree of professional engagement at all levels from staff.

In response to a question from Councillor Mackie on GCSE outcomes, the Chief Officer explained that for a number of years the Local Authority was not permitted to

report individual school performance and this data was for schools to use themselves to drive their own improvement journeys. The portfolio strove to drive improvements in schools, and it was agreed that an updated report be presented to the February meeting once this year's results had been verified. She was reassured by Head Teachers and GwE colleagues that the improvement in schools was reflected in their individual self-evaluation documents and priorities in their School Improvement Plans. All schools had School Improvement Plans and support plans from GwE, and this was a priority to continue to drive up the outcomes for learners in their qualifications.

In response to a question from Councillor Hilary McGuill around trauma counsellor support for refugee young people, the Chief Officer referred to the Local Authority's self-evaluation report which included pupil wellbeing, trauma informed practice and impact of adverse childhood experiences. The report outlined the support and training that staff had undertaken in schools to support pupils using trauma informed practices and this was referenced in the report.

The Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) confirmed that there was a lot of work being undertaken in schools around trauma informed practice. An awareness raising event had been held for senior local authority officers and school-based staff which had included the Chief Officer. Access was also being provided to the 11 day Trauma Informed Diploma. This was initially being targeted at the designated person for looked after children in schools but had been extended wider. This opportunity provide a detailed insight into trauma informed practice which would be targeted for children who were looked after. Schools were being encouraged to develop their awareness of trauma informed practice, and this was being driven by all senior officers across the portfolio to ensure that this also filtered across all of the services. She then referred to the Young Persons Counselling Service which worked closely with the refugees and emphasised the importance of clarity on the roles of the Council's services and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS) practitioners as these were quite different roles. She outlined the different ways of working in the primary and secondary sectors and referred to the CAHMS in Reach service which operated under the Health Board and were allocated to all schools. This service was working on the mental health training programme for schools to ensure that staff received appropriate training to enable them to identify mental health needs and provide that level of support from a school perspective.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved by Councillor Paul Cunningham and seconded by Councillor Arnold Woolley.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the Annual Report 2022-2023 and the positive impact of the regional service in supporting Flintshire schools, maintaining the focus on effective and successful schools.

26. SELF-EVALUATION REPORT EDUCATION SERVICES 2022-23

In introducing the report, the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) explained that the report had been produced in line with the current Estyn Framework for the Inspection of Local Government Services which focused on outcomes, equality of education services,

leadership, and management. She confirmed that Estyn were coming to the end of the current inspection cycle, and they expect to have completed their inspections by the end of summer 2024.

The Chief Officer advised that Estyn were currently developing a new framework from Autumn 2024 onwards. It was explained that whilst the Authority was inspected in 2019 it was likely that the next inspection could be near the front of the new framework, with planning work ongoing for the commencement of the next cycle of inspections. The recommendations made by Estyn were highlighted within the report which also provided a detailed summary of work being undertaken in response to the recommendations.

Councillor Hilary McGuill sought clarification on the Condition Grades listed as A,B,C and D identified as part of the Suitability Survey. The Chief Officer explained that surveys were undertaken on the school estate on a cyclical bases, which included inspections on the suitability of the building to deliver appropriate educational provision. There was also a survey of the condition of school buildings against industry standards and this information was used to determine where essential maintenance or a radical school modernisation programme was required. She suggested that the Senior Manager School Place Planning provide a short briefing note to explain the differences in the condition grades to the Committee following the meeting.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved by Councillor Hilary McGuill and seconded by Councillor Carolyn Preece.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the outcome of the Education Portfolio's annual self-evaluation report on the quality of education services for the period 2022-2023.

27. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 p.m. and ended at 4.14 pm)

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Chair