

EDUCATION & YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
16 MARCH 2017

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold, Flintshire on Thursday, 16 March 2017.

PRESENT: Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors: Marion Bateman, Paul Cunningham, Adele Davies-Cooke, Andy Dunbobbin, Colin Legg, Dave Mackie, and Nigel Steele-Mortimer

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Lynn Bartlett, David Hytch, Rebecca Stark and Bernard Stuart

SUBSTITUTION: Councillor Hilary McGuill (for Councillor Nancy Matthews)

APOLOGIES: Councillors David Healey, Janine Beggan and Bernard Stuart.

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Chris Bithell (Cabinet Member for Education), Chief Officer (Education and Youth), Senior Manager School Improvement. (For minute no. 59) Vicky Barlow, Senior Challenge and Support Adviser (GwE), and David Edwards, Assistant Senior Challenge and Support Adviser (GwE)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator, and Committee Officer

57. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

58. MINUTES

- (i) The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19 January 2017 had been circulated to Members with the agenda.
- (ii) The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 2 February 2017 had been circulated to Members with the agenda.

Matters arising

Referring to the resolution under item 54 of the minutes, the Facilitator confirmed that a letter had been sent to the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams AM, and that she would send a copy to the Committee for information.

RESOLVED:

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

59. REGIONAL SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPROVEMENT SERVICE (GwE)

The Senior Manager School Improvement introduced the report to inform the Committee of progress with the development of the Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service (GwE). She introduced Vicky Barlow, Senior Challenge and Support Adviser (GwE), and David Edwards, Assistant Senior Challenge and Support Adviser (GwE), and invited them to present the report.

The Assistant Senior Challenge and Support Adviser (GwE) provided background information and referred to the two key elements of the Service Level Agreement between GwE and local authorities which were the Challenge and Support Programme to all schools, designed to ensure a clear and unambiguous focus on improving school performance and outcomes for learners through a model of 'supportive challenge and challenging support' via regular visits to school by GwE Challenge Advisers, and the GwE Development Programme to promote and facilitate the professional development of all practitioners to ensure the highest standards of teaching and leadership to underpin a self-improving system, which secures the highest outcomes for learners.

The Assistant Senior Challenge and Support Adviser (GwE) referred to the main considerations which were detailed in the report and advised that the over-arching priority of (GwE) was to secure improved outcomes for learners across the region at all key stages. He reported that the main focus for improvement at the current time was to improve the percentage of key stage 4 pupils who achieved the Level2+ indicator (5 GCSE passes A* to C including English/Welsh and Mathematics). He explained that progress towards this improvement priority was being robustly monitored by GwE and that Challenge Advisers had undertaken a focused visit to all secondary schools during the Spring term to carry out a review of the school's progress in meeting their L2+ targets.

The Assistant Senior Challenge and Support Adviser (GwE) explained that all schools in Flintshire were being actively encouraged to access the Development Programme offered by GwE which aimed to provide quality professional development opportunities for teachers at all stages of their career. The number of conferences and training courses offered by GwE continued to be expanded and the development of bespoke leadership programmes extended.

Councillor Hilary McGuill commented on the importance of maintaining continuity of the Challenge Advisors in schools and commented on the additional pressures on schools who experienced frequent changes in the Challenge Advisors they worked with. The Assistant Senior Challenge and Support Adviser (GwE) acknowledged the point and explained that GwE would try to ensure continuity where possible but some changes were beyond its control and referred to the secondment of some advisers as an example. He commented that whilst continuity was important there was also a benefit to

be gained from a “fresh pair of eyes” working with schools to provide the support and challenge needed.

Councillor Dave Mackie expressed concerns around the progress which had been achieved in schools since the introduction of GwE which he felt was not as good as expected. He cited examples from the information provided in the GwE Business Plans, Level 1 and Level 2, which were appended to the report, to outline his concerns around the lack of improvement in Flintshire schools.

The Senior Challenge and Support Adviser (GwE), responded to the concerns raised and referred to a review which had been undertaken of the GwE service, the recent appointment of a permanent Managing Director, and the development of a revised secondary challenge and support programme model for 2017. She also referred to the goals to be achieved by Summer 2017, and the regional priorities and actions outlined in the Business Plans which were appended to the report.

The Senior Challenge and Support Adviser acknowledged that there was still work to be done in terms of support and challenge in the Secondary sector and commented on the specific concerns identified and the revised secondary model which aimed to ensure that better use is made of the expertise and experiences of Senior Challenge Advisers, Challenge Advisers, School Senior Leaders and Education Officers to provide high quality assistance and support that is consistent across all hubs and regions. She explained that the secondary model aimed to ensure that schools received a holistic support package for all aspects of its work drawing on expertise from within the consortium, local authorities, and schools themselves.

Referring to the Development Programme provided by GwE to schools the Senior Manager School Improvement said there was a need to look at how many schools were accessing the training offered and how that information could be shared more effectively in terms of the dashboard. In response to the comments raised by the Chair concerning the time and venue for some of the training courses provided, the Senior Challenge and Support Adviser explained that feedback had been taken on board and changes had been made to the Development Programme where possible.

During discussion the Senior Challenge and Support Adviser responded to the comments and concerns raised by David Hytch around curriculum breadth, collaborative working, and the credibility and consistency of the advice being offered to schools by challenge advisers.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the update on the school improvement service joint arrangement (GwE) and that Flintshire’s priorities and objectives within the GwE Business Plan be noted; and

- (b) That the development and delivery of the GwE integrated core Challenge and Support Programme and the Development Programme be noted.

60. SELF EVALUATION OF EDUCATION SERVICES

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced the report on the self-evaluation of Education Services to enable Members to fulfil their role in relation to the performance monitoring of education services. He provided background information and explained that a copy of the current self-evaluation was appended to the report for consideration and referred to the current performance and recommendations outlined on pages 88 and 89 of the document.

The Chief Officer reported on the current position and referring to the Primary school categorisation he advised that the position was particularly positive, however, the Secondary sector was managing to maintain its position and further work was required at Key Stage 4. The Chief Officer commented on the work to be undertaken with GwE in terms of the Secondary Challenge and Support Programme Model for 2017, and the work undertaken to identify young people at an early stage to make sure they receive the appropriate advice and guidance around apprenticeships, sixth form education, college and work.

David Hytch raised a number of concerns and referred to unauthorised attendance, and difficulty in recruiting and attracting leaders to senior roles in schools. In his response the Chief Officer said he was confident that there was capacity within the teaching profession and commented on the need for recognition and encouragement in the development of people during difficult times. He commented on the need to develop opportunities which would enable people to progress through school leadership to take schools forward.

Councillor Chris Bithell commented on the positive achievements in the Service and referred to the support for additional learning needs and social inclusion which was good, and the level of performance at KS3 in Secondary schools which was also good. He referred to the work being undertaken to reduce the gap between FSM and non-FSM pupils to achieve improved outcomes for FSM pupils, the progress achieved in the school modernisation programme, and the reduction in the number of overall school places.

Rebecca Stark commended the Authority, the Chief Officer and his team, on the performance of schools and the continued strive for excellence throughout the prolonged period of financial austerity faced by the Authority. She expressed the view that there was a need for a period of stability to enable schools to absorb the many changes that had taken place across the curriculum.

In response to the comments made by David Hytch around the need to develop a 'workforce' for the provision of education in the future, the Chief Officer commented on a media campaign in Wales to encourage young

people to consider the career opportunities available through the teaching profession.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

61. QUARTER 3 IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2016/17 MONITORING REPORT

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report to present the monitoring of progress for the third quarter of the Improvement Plan 2016/17 priority 'Skills and Learning' relevant to the Committee. He advised that it was a positive report and referred to progress against agreed actions, as detailed in the report, and the two major risk areas concerning the number of school places not matching changing demographics and the limited funding to address the backlog of known repair and maintenance work in Education and Youth assets.

In response to the concerns raised by David Hytch around the repair and maintenance work needed in Education and Youth assets, the Chief Officer explained that the backlog of work had reduced considerably as a result of the continued school modernisation programme and the 21st Century Schools Programme, however, although progress had been achieved there was a risk that this could not be maintained in the future.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee supports the progress made under Quarter 3 of the Improvement Plan for the 'Skills and Learning' priority.

62. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There was one member of the public and no members of the press in attendance

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 3.48 pm)

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Chairman