

EDUCATION AND YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
27 SEPTEMBER 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Room, County Hall, Mold, Flintshire at 2pm on Thursday, 27 September 2018

PRESENT: Councillor David Healey (Chairman)

Councillors: Geoff Collett, Paul Cunningham, Andy Dunbobbin, Patrick Heesom, Dave Hughes, Kevin Hughes, Tudor Jones, Dave Mackie, Ian Smith, Martin White and David Williams

CO-OPTED MEMBER: David Hÿtch

APOLOGIES: Councillor Sian Braun, Lynn Bartlett and Rebecca Stark

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Ian Roberts, Cabinet Member for Education; Chief Officer (Education & Youth); Finance Manager (People & Resources); and Learning Advisor (Health, Wellbeing & Safeguarding)

IN ATTENDANCE: Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officer

12. OPENING COMMENTS

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman took the opportunity to congratulate Claire Homard on her recent appointment to the Chief Officer post.

The Chairman read out a joint statement that he had requested from the Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) and the Transport & Logistics Manager in relation to school transport to Hawarden High School:

'Following the withdrawal of the number 7X commercial bus service, which operated from Manor Lane to Deeside College and was used by a number of non-qualifying pupils to travel to and from Hawarden High School, the Council has received a number of applications for free transport to the school.

An assessment of the walking routes available for all the pupils who have applied for transport has been completed, which has identified some minor shortcomings and therefore the available walking routes have been deemed to be marginally hazardous for the Pentre, Mancot and Sandycroft areas.

However, with some minor improvement works, these routes could be made available for pupils to walk safely to school in the future. Transport has been granted for all pupils who apply through the appropriate process for a 12-month period to allow for a review of the available walked routes to be undertaken during this period with a view to withdrawing free transport from September 2019. This will also apply to any existing pupils in receipt of

transport who have qualified on the basis of hazardous route for the above areas.'

A copy of the statement would be emailed to all Committee Members. Councillor Mackie asked that the two local Members for Mancot also be included.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Dunbobbin declared a personal interest on agenda item 6 'School Reserve Balances' as Chair of Governors at Connah's Quay High School.

14. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 24 May and 28 June 2018, and the joint meeting with Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 24 May 2018 were submitted.

Minutes of 24 May 2018

On minute number 1, the sentence should be changed to reflect that Councillor Healey was to be appointed as the Chairman.

Minutes of 24 May 2018 (joint meeting)

On minute number 4, Councillor Williams questioned whether there was a sufficient range of vocational courses available in schools and sixth forms to provide more options for young people. The Chief Officer explained that a significant amount of work was being undertaken by secondary schools to identify a range of curriculum choices to match courses appropriately and meet the needs of all learners, within the Welsh Government guidelines.

Councillor Heesom expressed disappointment that the minutes were not received at an earlier stage. On minute number 5, he referred to the detailed discussion on child safeguarding and said that his request for information had not been followed up, reiterating his concerns about the lack of youth services in his ward. The Chief Officer said that Councillor Heesom had been informed that arrangements were being made to schedule a meeting to discuss his concerns. Councillor Heesom also referred to attempts to have a derelict youth club removed from his ward.

Minutes of 28 June 2018

Minute number 7: In response to the comments made by David Hÿtch on Governors Wales, the Chief Officer spoke about Governors Cymru which had been established to support schools in addition to the ongoing support and training provided by GwE. The Authority had agreed to pay the first 12 months' subscription for all Flintshire schools to access support from Governors Cymru.

During discussion on the same item, a number of members queried the inclusion of resolution (a) which was based on the report's recommendation to accept the GwE Annual Report. It was commented that the Annual Report had not been discussed and that only part of it had been appended to the agenda rather than the entire version which had been shared with Members at Wrexham County Borough Council. It was noted that a copy of the full report had been emailed separately to the Committee. The Chief Officer said that efforts would be made to ensure greater parity of information shared by GwE with Overview & Scrutiny committees across the region. The Committee agreed that resolution (a) should be removed from the minutes as it did not apply.

The Chief Officer advised that concerns about recruitment and retention levels at senior to middle tiers of leadership would be included as a topic at the next Secondary Head Teachers' Federation meeting and feedback given to the Committee.

Minute number 8: Concerning his comments on Deeside Sixth, Councillor Williams reiterated his request for details of the Council's investment, any financial contributions towards transport to the hub, list of available courses, together with enrolment and course completion numbers for 2016-18. The Chief Officer explained that this should form part of wider discussion on post-16 provision on which a commitment had already been given to holding a Member workshop. Due to the level of detail and forthcoming workshops on other topics, this would be scheduled for the New Year. In response to further comments, the Chief Officer and Cabinet Member explained that vocational provision could be accessed through Coleg Cambria sites whilst the Deeside Sixth was focussed on a more traditional academic route, thus providing a range of options for young people. It was also confirmed that the Head of Deeside Sixth would be present at the Member workshop.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the two amendments on the minutes of 24 May and 28 June 2018, the minutes of the three meetings be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15. TEACHER PAY AWARD 2018

The Chief Officer introduced the report detailing estimated costs and current funding position for the national pay awards for teachers and school support staff. This was an issue of significant concern as cost pressures facing councils and schools meant there was no capacity to absorb any further pay pressures.

The Chief Officer described the situation as 'severe' and praised the efforts of the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council in making representations that the Council could not be expected to cover the cost of a national award on which it had little influence. A high level estimate of Flintshire's share of additional funding to be provided by Welsh Government

(WG) to support the pay increase equated to around 50% of the total bill. In addition to the pay increase, recent intelligence about a predicted rise in teacher pension employer contribution costs was a cause for further concern. Attention was drawn to the risks to the financial resilience of schools and potential staffing implications.

Councillor Roberts referred to the Executive Summary of the report and clarified that the teachers' pay award had not been fully funded in England, as explained fully in paragraph 1.01. He went on to stress the importance of establishing the principle that those responsible for awarding a pay rise should fund it.

The Finance Manager explained that the rise in teacher pension employer contributions costs was unforeseen and that late information affected the ability of schools and councils to plan effectively.

Councillor Kevin Hughes said that the seriousness of the matter should be conveyed to residents and particularly parents in respect of the implications for young learners. In thanking the senior officers and Leader for their campaigning, he said there was a collective responsibility on all elected Members to raise awareness of the situation. He added that whilst he supported the pay increase, the cost should be fully funded.

Whilst David Hýtch said the pay rise for teachers was long overdue, he questioned what was to be achieved. He referred to the grade ranges and said that the increases for Upper Pay Scale and Leadership were still well below inflation levels. He added that the changes would not address problems with recruitment and retention, teacher supply and the differentials between classroom teachers and those at managerial levels.

The Chairman proposed that the Committee support the views expressed that the situation was unacceptable and that the award should be nationally funded whilst the Council continue its campaigning.

Councillor White referred to WG financial support for Airbus and made the point that the education of young people should also be properly funded to help them achieve their employment prospects.

The Chief Officer gave reassurance of regular communications with schools and Head Teachers to share intelligence and offer support on the rapidly changing picture. The Chairman commented that he was aware of schools' appreciation for this ongoing dialogue.

The Committee supported alternative resolutions to reflect the concerns raised, in addition to the point made by Councillor Roberts on the future responsibilities of WG.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee urges that the education workforce pay award be nationally funded; and
- (b) In its future role, that Welsh Government recognises the importance of fully funding any teachers' pay award.

16. SCHOOL HOLIDAY ENRICHMENT PROGRAMME

The Chief Officer introduced Claire Sinnott, the Learning Advisor (Health, Wellbeing & Safeguarding) who presented a report on the range of activities undertaken through the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP).

The scheme involved the delivery of healthy meals, food and nutrition education, physical activities and enrichment sessions to pupils at two Flintshire schools for 12 days during the summer holidays. The programme had been rolled out to a number of councils in Wales following feedback from the pilot scheme and was part funded by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).

Information was shared on the approach taken in Flintshire which had been developed in partnership with colleagues on a steering group. This was the first time that the scheme had been implemented in Flintshire and positive outcomes were reported from the two participating schools - Ysgol Treffynnon and St. David's High School. Cooking activities had proved particularly popular with pupils and this was highlighted as a key skill for future development. All responses from the evaluation forms completed by pupils and parents in Flintshire had been sent to WLGA for analysis, along with those of the other authorities.

Councillor Roberts congratulated the officer on the success of the programme which he had witnessed when attending both schools.

The initiative was praised by David Hýtch who suggested that the Chairman could write to thank the local businesses who provided support to the programme. In response to comments on attendance levels at the scheme at St. David's High School, it was explained that pupils had access to a minibus throughout the programme. On marketing, it was recognised that an increased social media presence was important along with early engagement with parents and local businesses.

Following a request by Councillor Heesom, the Learning Advisor advised that a copy of the WLGA analysis report on the national findings would be shared with Members. This would due to be received by the end of November along with details of eligibility criteria for next year's programme.

Councillor White felt it would be useful for the analysis to include feedback from the two schools on how Year 6 participants in the SHEP had transitioned into their new school, compared with those who did not take part.

The Chief Officer expressed her appreciation to Claire Sinnott for her enthusiasm in co-ordinating the activities in the scheme.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee applauds the work of the School Holiday Enrichment Programme 2018 and the progress made;
- (b) That the Committee supports the programme in the authority in 2019 and beyond; and
- (c) That the Chairman writes on behalf of the Committee to thank local businesses who provided food and support to the programme and the staff who donated their time.

17. SCHOOL RESERVE BALANCES YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2018

The Finance Manager (People & Resources) presented the annual report on school reserve balances in Flintshire, as at 31 March 2018. The report had also recently been considered by the Audit Committee.

The overall level of reserves had decreased by 11% since the previous year and a 47% increase in the net deficit of reserves held by secondary schools was offset by a 15% increase in primary reserves. Whilst the late allocation of Welsh Government (WG) funding had been welcomed, this masked the underlying trend on the outturn position. Secondary school budgets were under significant pressure and schools with positive balances held a low level of reserves which raised concerns about financial resilience. There were a number of contributing factors including pupil numbers, staffing and schools having to absorb the cost of inflationary increases due to continuing austerity measures. Reserve balances in the primary sector fared better, however demographic changes would result in a redistribution of funding between primary and secondary sectors. A forthcoming bulletin from WG reporting the national position would be circulated. The Council's accounting teams were working with schools to develop three year plans to help with budget management. A national benchmarking tool used by secondary schools was being developed for the primary sector to help identify savings on charges.

The Chairman was aware that some Members wished to raise queries on specific schools and that to do so would require a more confidential discussion. Councillor Mackie proposed that the press and public be excluded under the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985. This was seconded and supported by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting as the following item was considered to be exempt by virtue of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

18. SCHOOL RESERVE BALANCES YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2018

Councillor Mackie referred to the breakdown of school balances appended to the report and commended those secondary schools which had managed to reduce their deficit levels despite a drop in their delegated budgets. He went on to raise concerns about two other schools with a significant increase in their deficits and praised the efforts of primary Head Teachers in managing their smaller budgets.

The Finance Manager advised that there had been movement in the position of some schools since preparation of the report. She shared some of the concerns on specific schools and gave a reminder that there were multiple elements contributing to reserve balances and that delegated budgets were greatly affected by falling pupil numbers.

Councillor Roberts cited pupil numbers as a key issue brought about by various factors and that budget management was crucial as the first step to dealing with a deficit position. He said that secondary schools with positive balances should be acknowledged.

The Chief Officer said that Members' concerns about reserve balances in the secondary sector were shared and gave assurance that robust processes were in place to challenge schools in a deteriorating position and to provide support for those facing particular difficulties. She said there was no easy solution as schools had to take action to manage their budgets in-year whilst delivering the curriculum within a lean structure.

During the debate, Members reiterated their concerns about secondary school balances and those on the brink of a deficit position. Reference was made to the impact of Estyn reports, lower birth rates and school management structures. In regard to Estyn, the Chief Officer pointed out the purpose of the inspections in ensuring that schools were performing to their optimum level.

Councillor Jones thanked officers for the detailed information and asked about the levels of intervention to help schools to plan ahead. The Chief Officer said that a limited intervention fund was available to support schools with specific issues to aid their recovery plan post-inspection. She referred to the key role of school business managers in supporting Head Teachers. She agreed to follow-up the request for the Risk Management section of future reports to include a matrix showing movement in pupil/staff numbers and staff absence levels to provide more context on the impact on school budgets.

Following the discussion, the Chairman thanked officers for their contributions.

RESOLVED:

That the school reserve balances as at 31 March 2018 be noted.

19. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme for consideration and advised that an invitation would be extended for all Members to attend a workshop with GwE on 15 October 2018 on Welsh Government changes to presentation of learner outcome data. The Chief Officer advised that GwE would be sharing the information with governing bodies via Supporting Improvement Advisors.

It was noted that the Democratic Services Manager would shortly be contacting Members with dates of budget workshops.

Following a request by Councillor Mackie, an item on the ADTRAC initiative involving European social funding mechanisms to meet the needs of young people would be scheduled on the Forward Work Programme.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme as amended, be approved; and
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chairman, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

20. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2pm and ended at 4.35pm)

.....
Chairman