

EDUCATION AND YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 MAY 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Mold on Monday, 20 May, 2019

PRESENT: Councillor David Healey (Chairman)

Councillors: Janet Axworthy, Geoff Collett, Paul Cunningham, Andy Dunbobbin, Gladys Healey, Patrick Heesom, Kevin Hughes, Tudor Jones, Ian Smith, and Martin White

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Lynn Bartlett, David Hytch, Rita Price, and Rebecca Stark

APOLOGIES: Councillors: Sian Braun and David Williams

SUBSTITUTION: Councillor Rosetta Dolphin for Councillor Dave Mackie

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors: Mike Allport and David Evans

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Ian Roberts, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education; Chief Officer (Education & Youth); Senior Manager School Planning and Provision, and Learning Advisor, Health, Wellbeing and Safeguarding
Mrs. Jane Cooper, Headteacher Mold Alun; Mr. Steve Jackson, Chief Operating Officer; Coleg Cambria; Mr. Alex Thomas, Head of Deeside Sixth and ITU Manager (for Minute number 5).

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

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

The Facilitator advised that it had been confirmed at the Annual Meeting of the County Council that the Chair of the Committee should come from the Labour Group. As Councillor David Healey had been appointed to this role by the Group, the Committee was asked to endorse the decision.

(From this point, Councillor Healey chaired the remainder of the meeting)

RESOLVED:

That Councillor David Healey be confirmed as the Chairman of the Committee.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Councillor Paul Cunningham nominated David Hytch as Vice-Chair of the Committee and this was seconded by Councillor Martin White.

On being put to the vote David Hytch was appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee.

David Hytch thanked the Committee for their renewed confidence in him.

RESOLVED:

That David Hytch be appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 21 March 2019 were submitted.

Accuracy

Councillor Paul Cunningham said he had submitted his apologies to the meeting and asked that the minutes be amended to record this.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the above amendment the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. DISCRETIONARY TRANSPORT POLICY REVIEW – OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION

The Chair welcomed Mrs. Jane Cooper, Mr. Steve Jackson and Mr. Alex Thomas to the meeting.

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report to provide feedback on the outcome of the consultation on the review of discretionary school and college transport policy and to consider the options available. She invited the School Manager – Planning and Provision to present the report.

The School Manager advised that Cabinet had agreed a range of options for formal consultation on the discretionary school and college transport policy areas of post 16 provision and benefits entitlement. Consultation was carried out between 18 February and 5 April 2019. The report summarised the outcome of the consultation. The School Manager reported on the key considerations, as detailed in the report, and explained that the options included in the consultation, as agreed by Cabinet on 18 December 2018, were attached in full in appendix 2 to the report with a summary of the responses received.

In conclusion, the School Manager advised that if any new options were agreed by the Committee at the meeting a new period of consultation would be required to consider the proposals put forward.

The Chair invited Mrs. Cooper, Mr. Jackson and Mr. Thomas to address the Committee to outline their views on the outcome of the consultation, as set out within the report.

Mrs. Cooper, speaking on behalf of the Secondary Headteachers Association, thanked the Committee for the opportunity to put forward the views of Secondary Headteachers in response to the review of discretionary school and college transport policy and the options available. She said the Secondary Headteachers Association understood the cost pressures around school transport and the need to close the Council's funding 'gap', but it was important that all learners over 16 were encouraged to continue with their education and were supported to do so by accessing an education setting of their choice i.e. Post 16 education in schools or college. She continued that whilst it was important that learners had free transport to their post 16 setting it was of greater need that transport was made available across Flintshire, even at a small cost to parents, to enable students to continue in their post 16 education and make a choice about where they attended. The Secondary Headteachers Association supported the options where there was a charge to parents which was kept at a low level but retained the provision of transport for students.

Mrs. Cooper expressed the concerns raised by the Secondary Headteachers Association that withdrawing the transport would have a number of consequences including increasing traffic congestion around schools. She said it was important that students were encouraged to continue to use public transport to travel to and from school. In summary Mrs. Cooper said that whilst the Secondary Headteachers Association wished to remain status quo the need to review transport provision due to funding pressures was acknowledged and therefore the continuation of transport provision for students even at a small charge was considered to be a reasonable compromise.

Mr Jackson, speaking on behalf of Coleg Cambria, thanked Officers for the opportunity to enable Coleg Cambria to be included in the consultation process and spoke of the collaborative work undertaken by Coleg Cambria, the Council, and GwE regarding a network of transport provision. He said that the provision of free transport for Post 16 students was important so that learners had choice, which impacted on retention, participation and achievement. He referred to the problem of students dropping out of education and classified as 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEETS) and said offering a broad choice of transport options helped students to re-engage with education. He expressed concerns around the local transport infrastructure and said there was merit and strength in maintaining the current network of transport and commented that if Coleg Cambria was to become dependent solely on local transport this would give rise to significant barriers and challenges to where students chose to study. Mr. Jackson continued that the current transport provision was a more sustainable service and supported the Well Being and Future Generations Act which sought to limit the number

of vehicles which needed to access educational establishments through the increased use of public transport.

In summary Mr. Jackson advised that Coleg Cambria would wish to retain the status quo with no charge for transport to students, however, the challenges facing the public sector regarding funding were recognised and said that if it was decided to introduce a charge for school and college transport then Coleg Cambria would wish charges to be “phased in”, that costs be kept to a level which were affordable, and ongoing support provided for low-income families.

Mr. Thomas said he supported the views and concerns expressed by both Mrs. Cooper and Mr. Jackson.

The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education advised that the provision of school and college transport was a non-statutory service and was paid for by the Authority. He commented that many Local Authorities did not provide discretionary transport and explained that any recommendations made by the Committee to Cabinet could potentially have an impact on the level of Council Tax determined by the Council in the future. He referred to the examples of charges for post 16 transport provision, as detailed in appendix 2 of the report, and cited the example of a charge to parents per term of £100 which would equate to £1 per journey.

In response to a question from Councillor Collett around cost savings, the Chief Officer referred to the details of the possible calculated cost savings which were outlined in the report.

Mr. David Hytch said he acknowledged the efforts that had been made by the Council to protect school budgets as far as it could in recent years, but expressed concerns around the potential of introducing a charge leading to an increase in the number of young people in NEETS and asked whether parents were having to pay twice, given the increase in Council Tax, earlier in the year. He asked whether consideration had been given to the cost of administering a payment service for school transport and cited the increased administration required following the introduction of charges for the music service as an example.

Councillor Kevin Hughes concurred with the comments made by Mr. Hytch and also raised concerns around the possibility of students ‘dropping out’ of the education system. He asked that, if a charge was introduced, then it be kept as low as possible.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin commented on the Council’s previous decision to close Post 16 provision in some secondary schools in Flintshire and felt that it was unfair to introduce charges for pupils who had no other choice than to travel to other educational establishments for their Post 16 education. She also raised concerns around the cost for sibling groups and asked that consideration be given to reviewing the cost for sibling groups. The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education explained that the

decision to close Post 16 provision in some secondary schools had been taken due to them becoming unsustainable because of a reduction in pupil numbers.

Mrs. Rebecca Stark asked if concessions for families with more than one child accessing Post 16 education could be considered. She also queried whether a 0.5 post would be sufficient to administer the payment scheme and asked how this would work on a practical level.

The Chief Officer gave an assurance that if Cabinet recommended to introduce a charge for transport then pupil numbers for Post 16 education would be carefully monitored and further update reports could be provided to the Committee. In response to questions around sibling groups, further advice would need to be sought on concessions prior to a Cabinet decision.

Councillor Gladys Healey raised concerns around parents whose income did not meet the threshold to claim benefits and therefore would not be able to access financial assistance. She was concerned that this would have a negative impact on child poverty.

Councillor Martin White commented on the welcomed Welsh Government (WG) Well-being and Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 but raised concerns that no funding had been forthcoming to Local Authorities to meet the requirements within the Act which would have assisted in meeting the costs of transport for pupils. He also asked how the charge would be implemented to parents.

The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education agreed with the comments and cited examples of WG Policy decision which had a financial impact on Local Authorities with no additional funding forthcoming. The Chief Officer said that it would be important to consider parents ability to pay a charge and advised that the Council would not be expecting parents to pay an annual fee and said that a per term charge could be applied. If Cabinet recommended to introduce a charge, details on how this would be implemented could be provided to the Committee.

Mrs Stark asked whether collective lobbying of WG to assist in meeting the financial costs of school transport had been carried out. The Chief Officer said that she was not aware of any lobbying around school transport specifically but there had been a great deal of lobbying on funding public services in general. She acknowledged the challenges in trying to protect school budgets and shared Members concerns on the potential impacts on young people.

Councillor Tudor Jones outlined a number of scenarios which he felt had not been thought through, which included whether there would be a flat rate charge and could this be reduced if a pupil did not travel to and from their Post 16 education facility on a daily basis, and the costs for sibling groups. For these reasons he felt that an introduction of a charge would create unnecessary bureaucracy and said that the status quo should remain.

Councillor Marion Bateman asked whether consideration could be given to contacting local businesses to ask if they would like to advertise their business on school buses as sponsorship which could assist in meeting the costs of school transport. Councillor Patrick Heesom spoke in support of this suggestion as an alternative funding stream. He commented on the work of the Cross Party Working Group on Local Government Finance and the encouragement from WG for Local Authorities to access funding through alternative means.

Councillor Dave Evans commented on the lack of information around where pupils traveling to Coleg Cambria were coming from. He said that he had been considering alternative options and suggested that the Deeside Shuttle Service could be used to transport pupils to Coleg Cambria. He also suggested the option of looking to create a train station at Connah's Quay which would increase access to Coleg Cambria and wider Post 16 education provision in the future.

In response to a question from Mrs. Rita Price around equality impact assessments, the School Manager – Planning and Provision assured the Committee that all equality impact assessments had been carried out.

Following his earlier comments, Councillor Heesom proposed that Cabinet be asked to delay considering introducing charges for Post 16 transport provision in order to review the options of bringing in alternative funding streams. This proposal was duly seconded.

The Chief Officer outlined the implications of delaying the Cabinet decision and the notice period needed for parents. The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education advised that a delay in a decision could have an impact on the 2020/21 budget.

Councillor Chris Dolphin said that whilst he acknowledged the proposal and suggestion put forward from Councillors Heesom and Bateman, he was concerned that the level of funding required to meet the cost of Post 16 transport provision would not be in place before July 2019.

When put to the vote, the proposal from Councillor Heesom was lost.

Following discussion, the Committee supported the following recommendations:-

- That the Committee support Option 3, as outlined within the report;
- That free Post 16 transport to those entitled to benefits be retained; and
- That Cabinet consider concessions for sibling groups in Post 16 education.

The Chairman thanked the Committee, officers and guests for their contribution to the debate.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee recommend the following to Cabinet:-

- That the Committee support Option 3, as outlined within the report;
- That free Post 16 transport to those entitled to benefits be retained; and
- That Cabinet consider concessions for sibling groups in Post 16 education.

6. SELF-EVALUATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATION SERVICES

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) advised that the Council undertook an annual self-evaluation against the framework for the inspections of Local Government Education Services published by Estyn. The report provided an overview of that self-evaluation and highlights key strengths and reasons for development in the current provision for education services.

The Chief Officer presented the report and referred to the key considerations. She explained that the new framework for local authority inspections on education services was introduced in 2018 following a pilot period and focussed on outcomes; quality of education services, leadership and management. The Chief Officer advised that all local authority Education Services in Wales would be inspected by 2022 and would be given 10 weeks' notice of an inspection. The Authority had received notification that it would be inspected by a team of Estyn and WAO inspectors during 3-7 June 2019. A two day preliminary visit would take place 22 and 23 May. The Chief Officer explained that the self-evaluation report produced by the Authority would be the key document used by the inspectors to inform their lines of enquiry and judgements during the visit, supported by analysis of a range of data, and interviews with senior officers and key stakeholders. The Chief Officer drew attention to the five local questions, as detailed in the report, which would be scrutinised in addition to the general inspection framework.

In summary the Chief Officer said the report on Flintshire's Education Services would be published on 9 August 2019. She commented on the high standards achieved in Flintshire schools and said the outcomes for learners were well above the national average and some of the best in the region.

Councillor Kevin Hughes congratulated the Chief Officer and her team, and schools, for their dedicated work to continue to improve educational standards. He also paid tribute to the excellent work of Claire Sinnott, Learning Advisor, Health, Wellbeing undertaken to ensure young people were safeguarded and whilst the Authority worked constructively with parents it was a challenge if officers were refused access into a parental home where children were home schooled. The Chief Officer advised that there was currently a review of national policy around this issue taking place.

In response to the comments made by Mr David Hytch concerning the impact and challenges faced by schools due to lack of funding, the Chief Officer explained that investment in education had remained a priority for the Council despite continuing financial austerity, however, she would not mitigate the impact of poor funding on the

quality of education services but reiterated the high standards and good performance which had been achieved in Flintshire schools in the face of limited resources.

The Committee congratulated the Chief Officer on a comprehensive report and the breadth, overview, and value of the service provided. The Chief Officer said she would pass on the Committee's comments to her team.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the content of the self-evaluation be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee congratulates the department on the comprehensive nature of the report, and the breadth and overview and value of the service provided.

7. ADTRAC PROJECT

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report to provide an update on the work and outcomes of the ADTRAC project. She explained that ADTRAC was a European Social Funded project targeted at 16 to 24 year olds who had been classified as being not in education, employment, or training (NEET), and would run until October 2020. The project was split into 2 sub regions (East and West) and the Authority was partnered with Wrexham County Borough Council and operated under the East branch of the project. Other key partners included Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, and the Department for Work and Pensions and Careers Wales. The Chief Officer explained the context and provision of the project and referred to the main considerations as detailed in the report. She advised that to date 158 young people had engaged with the ADTRAC project and a further 14 were waiting.

Councillor Patrick Heesom expressed concerns about the opportunities for young people aged 15 – 25 across all parts of the County to be able to access funding through the ADTRAC project. In response to the comments from Councillor Heesom regarding the availability of funding the Chief Officer referred to the criteria for the Project and agreed to facilitate a meeting between Councillor Heesom and the Head of the Inclusion service to discuss the issues raised in further detail.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee acknowledge the importance and value of the work and impact of the ADTRAC service.

8. SOCIAL MEDIA AND INTERNET SAFETY IN SCHOOLS

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) invited the Learning Advisor, Health, Wellbeing and Safeguarding, to present the report. She explained that the report had been produced in response to members seeking an update on the previous report presented in November 2017, to provide assurance that children and young people in

Flintshire schools were receiving the appropriate support to develop their skills in relation to the use of social media and internet safety.

The Learning Advisor, Health, Wellbeing and Safeguarding, provided background information and referred to the key considerations, as detailed in the report, concerning social media and internet safety. She drew attention to the School Health Research Network, UK Government proposed legislation, the Digital Competence Framework, Estyn safeguarding self-evaluation, Hwb platform, 360 Degree Safe Cymru, All Wales School Liaison Core Programme, and Safer Internet Day.

The Chair expressed concerns regarding cyber bullying and the inappropriate use of social media and commented on the need to use technology responsibly and respectfully. He suggested that members needed to be mindful of their own use of social media and undertake to set an example to young people.

In response to the concerns raised by the Chair all members of the Committee and Officers stood to pledge that they would not themselves engage in social media in ways which denigrate other individuals.

Councillor Kevin Hughes commented on the increasing use of social media in all aspects of daily life and the fast changing provision of internet-enabled technology. He proposed that an item on social media and internet safety in schools be regularly included on the Forward Work Programme for the Committee and this was agreed by members.

Councillor Patrick Heesom congratulated the Learning Advisor, Health, Wellbeing and Safeguarding, on a comprehensive report and said it would be helpful if a copy was circulated to all Members for information following the meeting.

During discussion the Learning Advisor, Health, Wellbeing and Safeguarding responded to the questions and comments raised by members around parental awareness and reported on the initiatives in schools to engage with parents and share good practice to keep young people safe on-line and during use of social media.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee confirms they have received an appropriate level of assurance about the education offer to schools in relation to online safety including social media;
- (b) That Members undertake to set an example to young people, in the way in which they engage in social media themselves;
- (c) That Members support moves to invite all Councillors to make such a commitment; and
- (d) That a copy of the report be made available to all Councillors.

9. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme for consideration. She reported that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 27 June, and following approval of the Schedule of Meetings 2019/20 at the Annual Meeting of the County Council in May 2019, the future meetings of the Committee had been included on the Programme.

The Facilitator drew attention to the meeting of the Committee scheduled on 26 September, and said the outcome of the Estyn inspection of Flintshire County Council would be presented for consideration. She also advised that the Senior Manager Integrated Youth Provision, had been invited to attend the meeting of the Committee on 7 November 2019, to provide information on the work of the Youth Justice Service.

The Committee agreed with the suggestion from the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) that following completion of the Education & Youth portfolio business plans, she would liaise with the Chair to populate the Forward Work Programme.

The Facilitator explained that she had sent an email to all members of the Committee, inviting them to attend a site visit at the new build school at Penyffordd on Tuesday, 25 June. She asked that members wishing to attend the site visit let her know as soon as possible.

RESOLVED:

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

10. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.30 pm and ended at 5.38 pm)

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Chairman