

EDUCATION & YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 DECEMBER 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the Education & Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Room, County Hall, Mold on Friday 20th December 2019.

PRESENT: Councillor David Healey (Chair)

Councillors: Sian Braun, Geoff Collett, Bob Connah, Andy Dunbobbin, Gladys Healey, Kevin Hughes, Tudor Jones, Dave Mackie, Ian Smith and Martin White

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Lynn Bartlett, David Hytch, Rebecca Stark and Wendy White

SUBSTITUTION: Councillor Sean Bibby (for Cllr Paul Cunningham) and Cllr Patrick Heesom (for Cllr David Williams)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Martin White

CONTRIBUTORS: Chief Officer (Education & Youth), Senior Manager School Improvement Systems, Dave Edwards (Senior Primary Core Lead – GwE) and Martyn Froggett (Senior Secondary Core Lead – GwE) for minute number 36.

IN ATTENDANCE: Education & Youth Facilitator and Democratic Services Support Officer

Prior to the start of the meeting the Leader shared the good news that Ysgol Treffynnon had moved out of special measures following its last inspection and wished to thank the Chief Officer, Senior Manager, Martyn Froggett, Head Teacher and Teachers for all their hard work. He was very pleased that Flintshire had no secondary schools in special measures.

The Chair agreed saying this was a good start to the meeting and was pleased that this was a successful outcome.

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

35. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2019, were submitted.

The recommendation within the report were moved by Councillor Dave Mackie and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey.

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2019, were submitted.

Councillor Patrick Heesom referred to page 13 and his concerns regarding consequential and to the risk of increased levels of Council Tax and was pleased that the level would be under 5% following the settlement from Welsh Government (WG).

In response the Leader referred to the recent Cabinet and Group Leaders meetings where it had been reported it was the intention to set the Council Tax at less than 5% but at present the level was unclear. He said within the information provided by WG there was an expectation that Council Tax would rise by 7.1% this year across Wales. This was not a cause for celebration and more information would be shared once received. There was an enormous amount of information to go through especially with regard to grant funding and that following the General Election there could be more consequential for Wales early in 2020 when the budget would be set.

The recommendation within the report were moved by Councillor Andy Dunbobbin and seconded by Councillor Kevin Hughes.

RESOLVED:

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

35. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Facilitator presented the Forward Work Programme which had been updated following the last meeting and was attached at Appendix 1. The only alteration was the Child Poverty item which had been moved to the next meeting on 30th January. All actions arising from the previous meetings on the 7th and 22nd November had been completed and a letter had been sent to the Chief Executive of the Youth Justice Board with a copy emailed to Members of the Committee. No response had been received as yet but this would also be circulated to Members. She confirmed the actions following the Estyn inspection had been included on the forward work programme and that the comments on the performance reports raised by Councillor Mackie had been fed back to the Performance Team and that the actions and risks had been amended and would form part of future quarterly performance reports.

The recommendations within the report were moved by Councillor David Hytch and seconded by Mrs Rebecca Stark.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme as amended, be approved;

- (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; and
- (c) That the progress made in completing the outstanding actions be noted.

36. PROVISIONAL LEARNER OUTCOMES

The report was presented by the Chief Officer (Education and Youth) and provided information on Learner Outcomes for Key Stage 2 and 3 together with a detailed report from GwE. She referred to the ongoing changes to performance reporting and to a meeting held with Welsh Government (WG) to understand how reporting to Scrutiny would need to be modified in the light of those changes. She added that information on Key Stages 4 and 5 could not be circulated at the meeting as it was still provisional but would be brought to the March Committee meeting.

The Senior Manager referred to the executive summary which provided an overview following the recent member workshop and the significant changes in reporting and also for teacher assessments for Key Stage 2 and 3 for Welsh schools. She referred members to the appendix which provided more detail together with an indication on how schools would manage the transition and maintain standards.

Mr Dave Edwards (Senior Core for Lead Primary) confirmed standards for Foundation Stage and Key Stage 2 within Flintshire remained above the national average. He referred to Value Added and the expected levels schools should achieve across Flintshire, however for some schools this was a real challenge but said with the reporting changes this would acknowledge these challenges especially with regard to outcomes. He provided more detail on how information on each individual school was monitored to ensure all pupils achieved their potential. He then referred to the information provided on the gap between boys and girls and free school meals and also the work being carried out in schools following the Estyn inspections.

Mr David Hytch commented that he had difficulty understanding the figures as regards pupil progress without a base line level and asked if Mr Edwards had access to that information but was unable to share it. In response Mr Edwards said the data would become less available in future but with the use of the tracking programme this would enable GwE to measure value added especially for children with low literacy skills and provide an overview of how support for these children could be tracked through Foundation Stage onwards. He added, at Key Stage 2 schools worked together to use moderation to share, evaluate and create levels to understand what the outcome for Key Stage 1 and 2 would look like.

The Senior Manager referred to the previous reporting of data, rankings etc. and said in 2017 91% of Key Stage 2 learners achieved the expected level. The process of moving to the accountability framework which would look at the quality of education as a whole and include the wellbeing of pupils, Estyn outcomes and the provision at schools to ensure young people achieved their potential.

The Leader referred to indicators and detail previously received and said that WG guidelines stated that comparisons should be against the Welsh average. The Value Added was very important to ensure every child especially those who required extra support where striving for excellence may not apply and that the lower levels of GCSE and A Levels was where that child needed to progress. He added the level should be where each child started and what progress they had achieved at Key Stage 2.

Mrs Rebecca Stark asked if all schools across Flintshire would be using the same GwE tracking system at Foundation Phase. She also asked if GwE and the Council would continue to receive comparison data in order to monitor school performance which could not be shared with school governors.

The Senior Manager responded to explain that the statistical information from WG would be the Welsh average and that the local authority and schools would not have access to comparable data for all schools. The Key Questions GwE were proposing for Key Stage 2 would assist school governors and include emerging questions which would provide information on the national picture, at regional and local authority level and within schools. This would enable Governors to ask questions for example on the progress of learners, value added progress within the schools and understand the challenges for pupils and schools using the tracker system.

Mr Edwards explained how the tracking system would work and provided an example of how a head teacher during the course of the first term met every teacher in their school to discuss the progress of every child within that class to understand what provision would be required. This would then be fed back to the governing body at the end of that term providing information on what was anticipated to happen for each year group. Doing this term on term would ensure school governors were kept up to date with the progress of the current children within their school. Robust tracking would ensure any issues were flagged earlier with teachers and head teachers updating the GwE advisors.

Mrs Lynne Bartlett wondered if the culture in schools with regard to collaboration had changed from when league tables were in place with schools being very competitive, secretive and reluctant to share best practice. She then referred to Foundation Stage assessments saying when a child entered school aged 3 and left at aged 7 it was difficult to measure steps forward as children needed to be outside, to play, talk, etc. and asked if children would be getting a better experience as teachers use their judgement rather than be tied down to statistics..

The Senior Manager referred to collaboration saying all schools in Flintshire had embraced this positively especially over the last 5 years with a raft of collaboration programmes in place. She felt previously the curriculum had been too narrow but when the new curriculum was launched in January it would be possible to see how this would work across schools. Mr Edwards added previously the culture around collaboration was not to share but to keep to yourself and explained now there was true collaboration with groups of schools working together on a specific project and provided examples of how this had succeeded.

Councillor Geoff Collett was pleased schools were moving to value added but wondered how it would be measured and asked if Flintshire could be measured against the UK average as well as Wales. In response the Senior Manager said with regard to Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 and 3 Wales assessed these differently but there were comparison of UK data for GCSE and A Levels. The Chief Officer added that English and Welsh models had become so different unlike Key Stage 4 and 5 and that ensuring at each stage of the child's learning was robust so when they reached Key Stage 4 and beyond they were able to compete with not only the UK community but internationally too.

Councillor Gladys Healey referred to the earlier comment on a head teacher speaking to all teachers about every pupil every term and was concerned that this would impact the workload and pressures of head teachers. She was also concerned about stigmatising pupils for having free school meals and felt all pupils should all be treated the same. The Chief Officer acknowledged the concerns about the workload of teachers but said the school's core business was to deliver an appropriately matched curriculum to ensure pupils progress. Teachers were accountable for the progress of the learners within their class and this would enable them to highlight at what stage their class was at the start of the year and to present day and provide head teachers and governing bodies with more detailed information to report to committee on the progress of their learners. Additional resources provided to schools ensure these children accessed the extra support for an appropriately targeted curriculum to enable them to progress well.

Mr Martin Froggett provided background on Key Stage 3 explaining the data provided information on the outcomes with a number of reasons why the outcomes had risen and why the same could not be said for key stage 4 and 5. He added Estyn did not prioritise Key Stage 3 but were more focused on Key Stage 4 and provided examples of recommendations Estyn had given to schools on Key Stage 3.

He then referred to the Key Stage 3 outcomes and explained the different patterns and the reasons for the peaks and dips. In three years' time with the new curriculum there would be locally led information which would be different from school to school but would still provide comparable statistics at Key Stage 4 with a strong emphasise on the progress pupils made between ages 11 and 16 years with good progress measurements between Key Stage 4 and 5 which WG had introduced. Schools had their own systems such as CATS and base line tests to collect level 3 data and said the outcomes for Flintshire at Key Stage 3 were good but they had fallen as they had across Wales. There was no correlation between good outcomes at Key Stage 3 and 4.

The Chair referred to the overall education experience for students and the concerns surrounding well-being and wondered if there was a gold standard for well-being in place or was this something the schools had to develop for themselves. In response the Chief Officer confirmed WG had been clear that the well-being of pupils was fundamental to their progress through school and a consultation had taken place with national indicators being developed on that so in the future there would be a document that could be used to develop that standard within schools.

Mr Hytch referred to the graph and said it did not reflect well for Flintshire and felt as soon as public accountability was taken away standards dropped off. He said it should not just be for the three core subjects which undermined the whole curriculum and felt previously some schools had over inflated Key Stage 2 results and then had difficulties matching them at Key Stage 3. The experience of the child should enable them from low beginnings to make the choices at Key Stages 3 to take exams, undertake apprenticeships etc. and asked if that child was given the broadest possible experience at Key Stage 3 to enable them to decide where their strengths lay. In response the Chief Officer clarified the graphs were included as there was limited information available that could be brought to committee but challenged the comments around over inflated information at Key Stage 2 saying the outcomes were robustly moderated at Key Stage 2 and 3. There had been no controls over these outcomes which had not been her experience as a primary head or senior manager.

Mrs Stark referred to the priorities for the well-being of students but commented staff were not included and asked what was in places to ensure the well-being of staff was being monitored. In response the Chief Officer said teachers and staff were the schools most valuable resource and it was the responsibility of the head teacher to ensure the well-being of teachers was taken into account. All staff were committed to their roles and it was the responsibility of the head teacher to ensure teachers' time was used appropriately with everyone contributing at meetings to ensure concerns were raised. A high level of training and development was provided to teachers via GwE to enable them to be professional in their roles with excellent relationships between the schools, local authority and human resources to enable staff to access CareFirst and Occupational Health Service when required. Because of the strong collaborative culture of support between schools and the local authority this had provided another safety net.

Mrs Stark commented as a governor she was not aware of that support and felt this should be highlighted to Estyn and be included in the strategy and could also be used as a mechanism by Governors to support staff. The Chief Officer agreed saying this could be addressed via the Flintshire Governors Association and that an item could be brought to committee going forward to demonstrate how this was tested in schools. Head teachers could provide this information without disclosing personal and confidential information.

Councillor Dave Mackie referred to the last GwE report and commented that at Key Stage 4 the following areas were listed areas for improvement:-

- Ensure a full analysis and inquiry was undertake to verify why there had been a significant decrease in English A to C percentages
- 5 A* to A achievement had improved and remains an area of focus

He then referred to this year's report on page 44 where it stated "standards in the secondary sector remain a cause for concern. Over the past 18 months GwE has....." and listed a significant number of points. He was concerned that these were not included in last year's report if they had been happening for 18 months.

He commented on the improvement objectives suggesting there should be four points:-

- to identify the problem,
- to provide an action to resolve it,
- to provide a timescale and
- demonstrate what success should look like.

Councillor Mackie then mentioned the standards and the first bullet point “re-profiled its service to ensure that additional resource was targeted towards the secondary sector” saying that this could highlight how many staff had been brought forward and what was expected to show the successful outcome that GwE required. He proceeded to go through each of the bullet points referring specifically to teacher training and said the committee were not aware if any had taken place. It would be useful to have information on the types of training made available, how many teachers attended and what were their achievements which would assist members to understand what was happening in schools.

In response Mr Froggett agreed saying Councillor Mackie had raised some good points and that some of this information could be shared with committee. With regard to the numbers of staff attending training sessions this information was collated and said he would be happy to bring this to the next meeting. Schools were preparing for training on NVQ 8 together with bespoke training for specific schools which was needs responsive. Councillor Mackie added that this information would help committee to understand these points. The Senior Manager agreed and said regular updates were received from schools on what training teachers, head teachers and support staff had received. The information sat within the level 2 business plans which was the operational business planning for the day to day running of schools. The Chief Officer added that when the Key Stage 4 and 5 reports were brought to committee in the spring more of this information could be included to enable the committee to understand how the work and support plans were impacting on the outcomes for learners.

Mr Hytch referred to the GwE report on page 49 second paragraph down “no school was awarded an “excellent” judgement for any of the inspection areas”. He found this very concerning and asked if this was still the case. He asked if Estyn were harder on Flintshire Schools or was it funding related and said historically GwE had placed more emphasis on primary than secondary schools. In response the Leader said he was sure there were aspects in our secondary schools which were excellent and referred to Holywell coming out of special measures but he was far more concerned with inadequate and unsatisfactory levels which was where we were failing our young people.

It was suggested that Committee send a letter to Ysgol Treffynon expressing the Committee’s delight that they are out of special measures and congratulating them on the hard work of the Head Teacher, Teachers and pupils at the school

The recommendations (a) and (b) within the report were moved by Councillor Andy Dunbobbin and seconded by Councillor Kevin Hughes. The recommendation

for (c) was moved by Mrs Stark and Seconded by Mr Hytch and the recommendation (d) was moved by Councillor Mackie and seconded by Mr. Hytch.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That members receive the GwE report on Outcomes 2019 for Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, relating to regional context and local performance for 2019;
- (b) That the Committee notes the national changes to reporting on teacher assessment and the new interim Key Stage 4 measures;
- (c) That the Committee acknowledge the importance of the well-being of staff as the most important resource within schools; and
- (d) That the Committee requested a report on the GwE professional offer, the level of engagement on the offer from schools and the impact this was having on improvement, at a future meeting.

37. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press and public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.55 am)

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Chairman