

Education & Youth Portfolio

Self-Evaluation Report of Education Services



2022 -
2023

Introduction & Local Context – Flintshire County Council

Formed in 1996 following local government reorganisation, Flintshire is a well governed and high performing unitary local authority in the northeast corner of Wales bordering Cheshire, Wrexham and Denbighshire. Flintshire has a strong track record of being a direct provider of local services from Education, Social Care, Streetscene and Housing. Whilst direct provision is at the core of its model, Flintshire is also a creative and flexible council and operates both as a provider and a commissioner of services. It has been instrumental in developing collaborative arrangements such as a regional school improvement service, an employee-owned mutual in leisure, libraries and cultural services, catering and cleaning services and a local social housing trading company. Over the last few years, the Council has also developed its own residential care for children in order to provide high quality, local provision to meet growing demand in a more cost effective way. Continuing to develop sustainable models of delivery and maintaining high quality services continues to be a priority for the Council, particularly in challenging financial times, to secure the best outcomes for its residents and value for money for the public purse.

Flintshire provides local public services for 155,100 people who live in 66,973 households. It has the largest population of the North Wales authorities and is the seventh largest in Wales. The population is expected to rise by 2.1% by 2028 but this reflects more of an increase in the number of people over the age of 65 as the numbers of children, young people and the working population are predicted to decrease. In the 2021 census the number of children aged under 15 years decreased by 4.2% and the proportion of people aged 65+ increased to 21.4% (33,200 people) compared to 17.6% (26,836 people) in 2011. This will obviously impact on future demands for services in different ways.

With just over 6,000 staff, the Council is one of the two largest employers in the county, alongside Airbus, and provides direct services including, education, housing, planning, refuse collection, environmental health, recycling, roads, social services, trading standards, transport and tourism. It provides leisure, library and catering/cleaning services via 'arms' length' trading companies. Flintshire has seven libraries, ten sports and leisure centres, two country parks and maintains 733 miles of roads.

Flintshire has 78 schools (64 Primary, 11 Secondary, 2 Specialist & 1 PRU) providing education for 23,314 pupils, including those educated other than at school.

Manufacturing, retail trade and human health and social work are the sectors which currently employ the most people in Flintshire. The availability of employment is rising and unemployment in Flintshire in February 2023 stood at 3.0%, better than the Welsh average of 3.8%. The COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit will, however, have implications for the local economy and the population in the short, medium and long term. The North Wales Economic Framework, supported by UK, Welsh Government and Local Government funding streams provides a clear strategy for future economic growth and clearly articulates the skills and knowledge that will be needed within the local and regional population to deliver on emerging economic, social, digital, and wellbeing priorities.

The County has a mix of affluent and deprived areas. Due to the interconnections of factors, there are particular communities that are more vulnerable than others in Flintshire. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2019 highlights that coastal communities in Flintshire experience high levels of deprivation (3.3% of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) in 10% most deprived; 10.9% in 20% most deprived in Wales), particularly when it comes to the employment, income, education, and community safety dimensions.

The number of school aged pupils entitled to Free School Meals (e-FSM) has decreased from 20.41% in 2022 (Wales 2022 average 23%) to 14.08% in 2023. This figure is a significant shift away from

current Welsh averages and is linked to the Council being an early implementer of Universal Credit (UC). Families below the income threshold for Universal Credit are entitled to a free school meal but when earnings rise and exceed the UC threshold, the child continues to receive a free meal under Transitional Protection until that phase of the child's education ends. The Council does not receive any funding for pupils on Transitional Protection but is still required to make the provision of a meal. The reduction in the overall percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals will have a significant impact on funding streams to the Council and to schools as this is the measure of deprivation used in many budget formulae. Since 2019 the percentage of Flintshire children on Transitional Protection has increased from 0% to 39% so represents a growing risk to funding for education.

Based on the 2021 Annual Population Survey, the Welsh language is spoken by 23.9% of the population in Flintshire compared to 29.5% across Wales. This is a significant increase from the 2011 national census which reported 13.2% of the county's population having some Welsh language skills. The county has 5 Welsh medium primary schools and 1 Welsh medium secondary school. There are no dual stream or bilingual schools in Flintshire. Currently 6.34% of children in Flintshire are educated through the medium of Welsh. There are ambitious targets in the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan to more than double this number over the next ten years.

The county also has a mixed provision of faith-based education with 8 Church in Wales Voluntary Aided primary schools, 5 Roman Catholic primary schools and 1 Roman Catholic secondary school. 11.35% of children in Flintshire currently receive their education in a faith-based setting.

Flintshire has a strong tradition of supporting a local infrastructure of non-maintained early years' provision through both English and Welsh, which supports the Council in its delivery of childcare and early years' education. Flintshire was an early adopter of the Welsh Government's flagship childcare policy of 30 hours free provision for working parents and there is a strong network of childminders, playgroups and private day nurseries delivering this combination of childcare and early education prior to children transitioning into schools. Flintshire Council also supports neighbouring local authorities with the administration of their Childcare Offer.

Overall, 12.06% of school aged pupils in Flintshire in 2023 are designated as having a Special Educational Need. Of this number 2.74% have a Statement of Special Educational Need, higher than the Welsh average of 2%. 4.88% of pupils are designated as School Action which is lower than the Welsh average of 7.3% and 3.05% are at School Action Plus, lower than the Welsh average of 6.1%. Under the new legislation in Wales for Additional Learning Needs, there are also Individual Development Plans (IDP) in place which can be school maintained or Local Authority maintained. In Flintshire 1.39% of learners have an IDP which is higher than the Welsh average of 0.7%.

The current Chief Executive, Neal Cockerton, was appointed in November 2021 and was previously a member of the Council's Chief Officer Team. The Chief Officer for Education and Youth, Claire Homard, was appointed in June 2017, initially as Interim Chief Officer and then permanently in 2018. She also fulfils the role as Statutory Director of Education for the Council. The Leader of the Council is Cllr Ian Roberts, who up until May 2023 also held the role of Cabinet Member for Education, Youth? and the Welsh Language. Since May 2023, Cllr Mared Eastwood has taken on this responsibility. The Chair of the Education, Youth & Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee is Cllr Teresa Carberry.

Structure of the Council

Flintshire County Council has 67 Councillors that are normally democratically elected at least every four years. After the elections of May 2022 there is a minority Labour administration with informal support from the Liberal Democrats.

The political make up of Flintshire County Council elected members from May 2022 is as follows: Labour: 31; Independent: 26; Liberal Democrats: 4; Eagle Group: 3; Conservative: 2; Non-Aligned: 1.

The Council has a Cabinet and a Scrutiny function. Decisions are usually made by the Cabinet for all issues including major policy matters. The role of Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to hold the Cabinet to account and to assist in the improvement and development of the Council's policies and services. Flintshire has 5 Overview and Scrutiny Committees:

- Education, Youth & Culture
- Corporate Resources
- Community & Housing
- Environment & Economy
- Social and Health Care

There are several other Committees that are appointed by Council at its Annual Meeting to ensure that all other functions are discharged, including: Appeals; Clwyd Pension Fund; Constitution and Democratic Services; Governance and Audit; Grievance; Grievance Appeals; Investigation and Disciplinary; Joint Governance (for pensions); and Licensing. There is a detailed Constitution that describes the various parts that make up the Council, their functions, membership and procedural rules.

Cllr Mared Eastwood



**Cabinet Member for Education,
Welsh Language, Leisure & Culture**

Neal Cockerton



Chief Executive

Claire Homard



**Chief Officer
Education & Youth**

Working in Partnership

Flintshire County Council has a longstanding and proud track record of partnership working. The communities it serves rightly expect statutory and third sector partners to work together to manage shared priorities through collaboration. The Council works within the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and its sustainable development principles. Flintshire has a joint Public Service Board with Wrexham County Borough Council as it was acknowledged that by joining together, knowledge and resources could be shared and joint solutions found to tackle common challenges, specifically those around community resilience and COVID-19 recovery. This Joint PSB was formed in June 2020. The objectives of the Flintshire and Wrexham Public Service Board are:

- Build flourishing communities by reducing inequalities across environment, education, employment, income and housing.

- Improve community well-being by enabling people of all ages to live safe, healthy and independent lives.

The focused outcomes of the PSB Plan relate to Children and Young People, Our Communities and Where we work.

<https://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/PDFFiles/Policy-and-Performance/PSB/Flintshire-and-Wrexham-Public-Services-Board-Well-being-Plan-2023-2028.pdf>

Public Services Board partners include: Wrexham County Borough Council, Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, Public Health Wales, North Wales Police, North Wales Fire and Rescue Service, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, HM Prison and Probation Service in Wales, Flintshire Local Voluntary Council, Association of Voluntary Organisations in Wrexham, Coleg Cambria, Wrexham Glyndwr University, Do Well Ltd, NE Wales MIND and the Department for Work & Pensions.

Flintshire's Corporate Plan April 2022- March 2023

The Council Improvement Plan is reviewed and refreshed each year and approved by full Council. In the reporting period April 2022- March 2023, the following core improvement themes drove the business plans of each portfolio and were reported on via quarterly monitoring reports, culminating in an Annual Performance Report.

Theme / Wellbeing Objective	In-year Priority
Poverty Protecting people from poverty by supporting them to meet their basic needs	Income Poverty
	Child Poverty
	Food Poverty
	Fuel Poverty
	Digital Poverty
Affordable and Accessible Housing Housing in Flintshire meeting the needs of our residents and supporting safer communities	Housing support and homeless prevention
	Housing Needs and Housing Options
	Social Housing
	Private Rented Sector
	Empty Properties
Green Society and Environment Limiting the impact of the Council's services on the natural environment and supporting the wider communities of Flintshire to reduce their own carbon footprint	Carbon Neutrality
	Climate Change and Adaption
	Fleet Strategy
	Green Access
	Green Environment
	Renewable Energy
	Active and Sustainable Travel Options
	Circular Economy
Economy Enabling a sustainable economic recovery	Town Centre Regeneration
	Business
	Transport Connectivity
	Digital Infrastructure
	Local Development Plan (LDP) Targets
	Spending Money for the benefit of Flintshire
	Reducing worklessness
Personal and Community Well-Being Supporting people in need to live as well as they can	Independent Living
	Safeguarding
	Direct Provision to support people closer to home
	Local Dementia Strategy
	A well-connected safe and clean local environment
Education and Skills Enabling and supporting learning communities	Educational Engagement and Achievement
	Digital Learning Opportunities
	Learning Environments
	Learning Community Networks
	Specialist Educational Provision
	Welsh in Education Strategic Plan
Wellbeing	

Review of Estyn Recommendations from Local Government of Education Services Inspection (June 2019)

The Council's Education Services were last inspected by Estyn in June 2019 under the Local Government Education Services Framework. The outcome was a positive report and no requirement for any kind of follow up. The recommendations from the report were as follows and are embedded in business plans for the Council and the Education & Youth Portfolio:

R1 Improve outcomes for learners in key stage 4

R2 Reduce exclusions and increase attendance in both primary and secondary schools

R3 Improve the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the few front line education services identified in the report in order to provide more accurate information about the impact of the local authority's work

R4 Manage the reduction in school budget deficits more effectively

Post Inspection Action Plan - Estyn LGES Recommendations Evaluation 22-23

Officer	<u>Evaluation of Key Actions</u>	<u>RAYG</u>
R1: Improve outcomes for learners in KS4		-
VB	<p><i>Liaise effectively with GwE and Update level 2 Business Plan with GwE for 2022-2023</i></p> <p>The level 2 Business Plan was completed for primary, special and secondary schools during summer term 2022. Progress was monitored through regular meetings with GwE officers. The plan included identified regional priorities, a comprehensive support plan for schools and a wide range of professional development opportunities.</p> <p>Evaluation of the plan fed into the new GwE Regional Business Plan. This spans a three-year period between 2023-2026 which also contains a detailed 12-month Business Plan for 2023-2024. The priorities continue to be focused on a combination of improving school provision, leadership and outcomes, as well as delivering The Reform Journey and Curriculum for Wales.</p>	Green
VB	<p><i>Ensure all secondary school support plans are updated and include a focus on KS4 provision and outcomes</i></p> <p>All secondary school support plans were completed by Supporting Improvement Advisers in discussion with schools. These plans are live documents and kept under review. One secondary school plan was revised to meet the statutory requirements of a post inspection action plan following the school being placed in Significant Improvement in January 2023. This plan has been approved by Estyn.</p>	Green
VB	<p><i>Review the 14-19 curriculum offer for KS4 learners and update 14-16 and post-16 strategies</i></p> <p>New terms of reference have been developed for the Curriculum Deputies Group and they have continued to meet on a termly basis. Schools have shared their curriculum models and</p>	Yellow

	<p>continue to share expertise when looking at future requirements in light of the new curriculum and also the review of KS4 qualifications.</p> <p>Focused discussion and research has taken place with post-16 schools and their learners in light of the forthcoming major changes from the introduction of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER). The priority is ensuring continued excellent partnership working and strategic planning for Flintshire's post-16 sector.</p> <p>The Flintshire Post-16 Network was re-established following the pandemic to ensure all post-16 learners have the very best opportunities and outcomes. The network consists of headteachers from schools with sixth forms and a representative from Coleg Cambria. The network is divided into a Provider Group (all providers) and Core Group (schools with sixth forms). The Provider Group exists to provide strategic direction and local support and monitoring for Post-16 provision in Flintshire.</p> <p>The Post 16 Learning Adviser has met with Headteachers with sixth forms to evaluate current provision and assess future need. Work is currently underway on refreshing the Post-16 strategy. The focus remains on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring sufficient access to high quality and relevant education for all, including ALN students • Providing an offer that meets all needs including the needs of students and wider economic and employment needs • Building on strong reputations and specialisms within school sixth form provision • Ensuring Post-16 provision is sustainable, resilient, and efficient and delivers maximum value 	
<p>VB</p>	<p><i>Review the pre SEREN and SEREN activity offer for learners in Flintshire</i></p> <p>WG did not collect the data for SEREN for 2020 due to the pandemic. In 2022, 67% of students in Flintshire schools sixth form provision gained a place at a Russell Group University. This is an increase on 2021 when 60% gained a place. Nearly all other students took up a place at other universities or on specialist courses. It may be that some students also achieved places at Russell Group Universities but didn't register for SEREN. Some students will also have accessed SEREN provision through the Deeside Sixth provision provided by Coleg Cambria.</p>	
<p>VB</p>	<p><i>Work effectively across the service to ensure high standards of school performance and learner outcomes through support and challenge</i></p> <p>As a result of changes to the assessment and accountability framework for schools, schools are not required to undertake or record final assessments at FP, KS2. There is no comparative data for school performance measures at Key Stage 4 for 2022 examinations.</p> <p>Estyn resumed inspections for schools from April 2022. Inspections in the school sector began again in summer term 2022, with 15 Flintshire primary schools, 2 Flintshire secondary schools and the Portfolio Pupil Referral Unit (PPRU), inspected to date.</p> <p>Inspection performance across the school sectors overall is generally strong. One primary school and one secondary school are in the statutory category of 'In Need of Significant Improvement' and the PPRU and one secondary school are in Estyn Review. In nearly all cases, there is a strong record of close correlation between the Council's pre-inspection reports and Estyn findings. The Council has a very good track record in effectively supporting schools to be swiftly removed from Estyn categories. Powers of intervention, including the use of Warning Notices are used effectively where schools cause concern, to ensure challenge and support is timely and effective. Interim Executive Boards have provided successful challenge and intervention to schools in serious categories of concern.</p>	

	<p>This has helped to increase the pace of change and ensure robust accountability for standards and progress.</p> <p>The primary school inspection profile for Flintshire has been continuously strong. Between April 2022 and July 2023, 15 primary schools in Flintshire were inspected. Judgements are no longer given by Estyn for the five inspection areas but 93% of those schools inspected required no follow up by Estyn and five schools were invited to prepare a case study for Estyn which is an indicator of highly effective practice. One primary school was placed in the statutory category of 'In Need of Significant Improvement' in September 2022. A comprehensive package of support provided by the LA and GwE is in place for the school. There are no primary schools in the statutory category of Special Measures or in Estyn Review.</p> <p>Overall, the inspection profile for Flintshire secondary schools is satisfactory. Of the 11 secondary schools in the local authority, one is in the statutory category of 'In Need of Significant Improvement'. One other secondary school is in the non-statutory category of Estyn Review. Both schools were inspected during this academic year. No secondary school is in the statutory category of Special Measures. The two schools that were previously in Estyn Review were successfully removed from follow up in 2022. All secondary schools have bespoke support plans in place to ensure continued improvement. Schools causing concern are subject to robust monitoring. There are 360° action plans in place when needed and highly focused support provided by both the Regional School Improvement Service, GwE and the Local Authority.</p> <p>The inspection profile for Flintshire non maintained settings is strong. Seven settings were inspected during the 2022-23 academic year. There are currently no registered non-maintained EE providers in a follow up inspection category. A very small number of settings have been placed in Estyn Review or Focused Improvement over the last five years and the LA has demonstrated a positive track record in supporting these settings to be removed quickly.</p>	
<p>VB</p>	<p><i>Support the ongoing development of schools as learning organisations through the Alliance model</i></p> <p>All Flintshire Secondary schools are involved in the Alliance model.</p>	
<p>VB</p>	<p><i>Hold schools effectively to account for their performance through SPMG meetings where required</i></p> <p>As a result of national changes, there was a need to review how schools are identified as requiring monitoring by the School Performance Monitoring Group (SPMG) . This has been part of the national and regional discussions on evolving regional processes to support schools on their self-improvement journey. Engagement with schools should facilitate the early identification of schools that are in need of support, to prevent them becoming a school causing concern.</p> <p>The criteria for identifying schools requiring monitoring was previously based on two main factors – those schools which were categorised as being in an Amber or Red support category by the local authority & GwE, as part of the national categorisation model, and those in an Estyn follow up category i.e. Estyn Review or the statutory categories of Significant Improvement or Special Measures. The Welsh Government suspended school categorisation for the 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022 academic years, as part of its measures to reduce pressure on schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Regional consortia and local authorities continued to work in partnership</p>	

	<p>with schools to help provide them with the support they need to improve and to successfully implement reforms.</p> <p>In the summer term of 2022, the Welsh Government published a new school improvement framework, ensuring that learner progression and well-being is at the heart of all efforts to deliver high standards and aspirations. This means that National Categorisation has finished and will be replaced by a robust self-evaluation system where good practice can be shared and failure is urgently addressed.</p> <p>Since 2019, 3 primary schools and 3 secondary schools have been subject to monitoring by the SPMG. The challenges of the pandemic have resulted in understandable delays to the process as schools focused on firstly providing emergency childcare in the first period of lockdown and then subsequent periods of remote learning. At the end of the spring term 2023, there were 2 primary and 2 secondary schools under monitoring by the SPMG. The small number of schools reflects the very positive Estyn profile for schools in Flintshire.</p> <p>Through the work of the SPMG, members and officers have reflected that the process continues to be effective in contributing to an improvement in primary and secondary school outcomes over time, particularly in schools where there are significant and long-term challenges.</p> <p>When Estyn inspected the local authority in the summer of 2019, they recognised that the portfolio's arrangements for identifying schools causing concern work well, and in most cases lead to effective actions.</p> <p>The inspection identified that <i>"Officers and elected members in Flintshire know their schools and settings well and can outline clearly the relative strengths and areas for improvement. They recognise specific issues facing individual schools causing concern and act in a timely way to put in place the most appropriate support in collaboration with GwE"</i>.</p>	
R2: Reduce exclusions and increase attendance in both primary and secondary schools		
JW/ CS	<p><i>Amendments to the Exclusions Policy / Substance misuse policy to promote the use of diversionary options for young people at risk of exclusion</i></p> <p>Work has been underway to update the draft policy following consultation with Flintshire Sorted. However, progress has been delayed due to awaiting national guidance (Whole School Smoke Free Wales). However, in the last 12 months the Senior Management Team and Programme Board have had an opportunity to review the policy and we intend to progress to consultation with the Head Teachers Federation in the Autumn Term.</p>	
JW	<p><i>Development of diversionary activities for young people at risk of exclusion through substance misuse or anti-social behaviour</i></p> <p>A draft 5 day programme has been devised and has been tested in 2021 with a small cohort of young people who were at risk of exclusion. The pilot has allowed for amendments to the programme. However, the programme has not been extended further due to delays in agreeing an overarching policy and due to capacity within the Sorted Education Practitioner team.</p>	
JW	<p><i>Application through the Youth Endowment Fund for a Regional Youth Violence and Exploitation Prevention Officers and secure pathways for support for young people at risk of exploitation.</i></p>	

	<p>A regional YJS bid was submitted in 2021 to enable all 4 YJS areas to recruit Youth Violence and Exploitation Prevention Officers utilising resilience interventions developed as part of a PhD study completed within Gwynedd & Ynys Mon. Whilst we were successful in the early stages of our bid, we did not proceed to the final round and did not receive funding for the project. Other funding streams are currently being explored.</p>	
JW	<p><i>Implement any actions resulting from Extended Learning Reviews</i></p> <p>The YJS continues to operate a local Community Safeguarding and Public Protection Framework in addition to the mandated framework from the Youth Justice Board. In the last 12 months we have undertaken 2 Extended Learning Reviews within the multi-agency partnership. All actions form part of an ongoing Action Plan which is monitored through the YJS Delivery Group and Executive Management Board.</p>	
JR	<p><i>Complete the review of the Education Welfare Service (EWS) to ensure delivery model offers support and challenge to schools/parents and utilises all relevant data to inform and improve practice</i></p> <p>A revised model of delivery has been implemented across the EWS. The service now comprises of Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) and Education Support Officers (ESOs). EWOs are targeted at secondary schools along with safeguarding matters and more complex cases whilst ESOs work predominantly alongside the primary sector. There are designated ESOs who also work in the areas of Fixed Penalty Notices, Elective Home Education and Children Missing Education.</p> <p>Attendance and exclusion data is generated on a half-termly basis. The data is used by the EWS to identify schools where attendance is below the expected level and target resources to support an improvement. Despite the overall depressed levels of attendance both locally and nationally, there has been improvement in those schools where there has been targeted intervention and support. The data is shared on a wider service basis to support multi-service intervention, e.g. with regards to Traveller pupil attendance. Particular pupil cohorts have also been targeted, e.g. Year 6 /7 transition for pupils with below 85% attendance. This was piloted with a particular school and is planned to be rolled out across all secondary schools in the next academic year. Individual pupil exclusion levels are monitored to identify those where intervention is required to prevent escalation to permanent exclusion.</p> <p>It is difficult to see the impact of the actions given that levels of attendance remain below pre-pandemic levels and instances of exclusion continue to rise. This is widely attributed to the legacy of the Covid pandemic and services continue to review their actions to maximize impact.</p>	
JR	<p><i>Review the pilot Partnership work with secondary schools to inform and develop this model of engagement to improve attendance</i></p> <p>Partnership work is continuing with identified schools. The Welsh Government initiative - Community Focused Schools (CFS) - is in its first year of implementation using the allocated grant funding and this is being used to enhance the partnership working in the designated areas of Saltney, Holywell and Queensferry. A Community Hub has been established in one of the secondary schools to facilitate greater collaboration.</p>	
JR	<p><i>Working with schools to support development and implementation of flexible and bespoke educational packages to improve attendance and engagement</i></p>	

	<p>Funding has been directed to schools this year instead of being retained by the Council to support the implementation of flexible educational packages for their pupils. Schools have collaborated in some instances to commission specific courses of interest for groups of pupils or used funding for individuals to increase their levels of engagement. Levels of attendance remain lower than pre-pandemic but access to the direct funding has enabled schools to make provision decisions based on the needs of their particular pupils.</p>	
JR	<p><i>Utilise the statutory tools and approaches to support an improvement in attendance</i></p> <p>The use of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) was resumed in September 2022 following WG guidance. A designated officer within the Education Welfare Service oversees this process and schools are being supported to implement this approach to challenge and improve attendance as appropriate. Instances of non-payment are being followed up and has resulted in prosecution. The impact of implementing FPNs is limited to date given the short period of implementation and the complex nature of the cases taken forward at this point. It is anticipated that with the publicity around the outcomes of court cases in particular, parents will have a greater appreciation of the importance of school attendance and the levels to which schools and the Council will go to, to secure an improvement in engagement.</p>	
JR	<p><i>Improving awareness of trauma informed practice with schools and Education and Youth workforce</i></p> <p>Training on Trauma Informed Practice was delivered by Dr Carol Harper through Trauma Informed Schools to 18 delegates from the Education and Youth Portfolio including Chief Officer, Senior Managers, Service Managers, Head Teachers and Senior School Leads. The YJS (Youth Justice Service) has also accessed additional training for 5 practitioners through the Trauma Recovery Model Academy on Trauma Informed Practice. The Senior Manager for Youth Justice has also presented at Education and Youth Portfolio Meetings on progress being made on our Trauma and ACE (TrACE) development plan.</p>	
<p>R3: Improve the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the few front line education services identified in the report in order to provide more accurate information about the impact of the local authority's work</p>		
JW	<p><i>Improved monitoring for YJS Cohort excluded from education or not accessing education provision</i></p> <p>All children and young people referred to YJS are subject to a Triage Assessment by our Education Officer. Any young person not receiving their full entitlement of ETE is discussed as part of our monthly ETE Panel and plans to address exclusion and attendance are discussed between YJS and Inclusion Service. The YJS is a standing member on the EOTAS Panel which helps to escalate cases of concern or persistent non-engagement. The introduction of new Key Performance Indicators will require additional oversight of our cohort through our Management Board.</p>	
DMT	<p><i>Identify datasets for use as Portfolio/services within evaluation processes</i></p> <p>School Workforce Annual Census (SWAC) data for Welsh – protocol currently being developed between the Workforce Sub-group of the Welsh Education Strategic Forum and the School Management Information Team (SMIT). Information will be used to develop the forward work programme for this group each year, linked to the 10 year Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). The focus is to effectively target professional development for the Welsh language</p>	

	<p>with staff in schools to improve the quality of teaching of Welsh in schools and increase the numbers of staff who are competent and confident in their use of Welsh.</p> <p>Core attendance and exclusion data is now generated on a half-termly basis and shared across all managers in the Education Portfolio to support targeted intervention in schools.</p>	
JR	<p><i>Ensure appropriate monitoring systems and tools are in place to support evaluation and intervention in identified services</i></p> <p>Services have been supported to review the data available to them and the relevance of this in monitoring and evaluating service impact. The importance of this has been promoted through management meetings and there is evidence of improvement in this area through service self-evaluation documentation. The shift away from producing nationally published data has impacted on this process and required managers to really consider their purpose and the information which will demonstrate the impact of their services. This is an evolving process with managers and teams being at different stages in their development of embedding processes and continues to be a priority.</p>	
VB	<p><i>Review of local authority quality board meetings with GwE – new model for implementation from September 2021</i></p> <p>Review has been completed. An additional series of meetings was added to discuss all phase items with a particular focus on 360° support plans. GwE provide administrative support for these meetings and for the secondary phase meetings. The LA continues to provide administrative support for the primary phase meetings. The revised model is now well embedded and will continue for the 2023 -2024 academic year.</p>	
R4: Manage the reduction in school budget deficits more effectively		
VB LT	<p><i>Ensure there is close monitoring of primary schools where budgets place them at risk of financial deficit without prior action</i></p> <p>This is a now regular agenda item at Portfolio Finance Meetings. Detailed analysis has been completed by the schools' Finance Team to RAG schools' risk level over the medium term. The significant number of grant streams for schools during the last 18 months has added to the complexity of budget forecasting and so, as appropriate when supporting individual schools, analysis has been completed with and without grant funding expenditure to highlight over reliance on temporary funding sources to individual schools. The Senior Primary Learning Adviser has been working closely with those schools identified at increased risk to support them e.g. in the review of planning for class sizes and curriculum provision. Headteachers have been supported where required, including with specialist HR advice, to make appropriate and timely decisions to avoid financial deficit. The financial landscape continues to deteriorate generally for the Council, and this resulted in a 3% reduction to schools' delegated budgets for the 23-24 financial year. The impact of this is that more schools will face significant challenges in setting a balanced budget in the year ahead and school balances, which have previously provided a level of protection, are significantly reducing.</p> <p>At the closedown of accounts 8 schools finished the 22-23 year in a deficit position. 2 Secondary and 6 Primary (3 of the 6 were small negative balances (that is under £5,000 or 1% of budget) and therefore are not classed as requiring a licensed deficit. The remaining 3 were above that threshold, however licensed deficit applications were not received as required under the Protocol for Schools in Financial Difficulty. The council has written to all 6 of the governing bodies concerned to remind them of the requirements of the Protocol.) This compares with</p>	

	<p>prior year information as follows –15 schools were in deficit at the end of the 19-20 financial year (9 primary, 6 secondary), 5 schools were in deficit in 20-21 (4 secondary, 1 primary) and 2 schools in 21-22 (both secondary).</p>	
<p>VB</p>	<p><i>Continue to robustly scrutinise any recruitment requests for schools in deficit</i></p> <p>The Portfolio’s policy with schools for managing budget deficits is robustly managed Any requests are discussed with Finance, HR and Inclusion colleagues as relevant and taken to DMT/ Portfolio Finance meetings for review and for final decision. The significant number of time-limited grant streams for schools this year has made this more complex for schools and when considering requests, particularly given that grant funding comes with terms and conditions. In the main, requests come from 2 secondary schools who are in a licensed deficit position.</p>	

Self-Evaluation of Education Services 22-23

INSPECTION AREA 1: OUTCOMES

1:1 Standards and progress overall

Estyn suspended inspections of all education providers maintained by local authorities in March 2020 due to COVID-19 and no further inspections were carried out in 2019- 2020 or 2020-2021. Inspections in the non- maintained settings began again in spring term 2022 as well as pilot inspections for schools. Inspections in the school sector resumed in summer term 2022, with 15 Flintshire primary schools, 2 Flintshire secondary schools and the Portfolio Pupil Referral Unit (PPRU), inspected to date.

Inspection performance across the school sectors overall is generally strong. One primary school and one secondary school are in the statutory category of 'In Need of Significant Improvement' and the PPRU and one secondary school are in Estyn Review. In nearly all cases, there is a strong record of close correlation between the Council's pre-inspection reports and Estyn findings. The Council has a very good track record in effectively supporting schools being removed from Estyn categories. Powers of intervention, including the use of Warning Notices are used effectively where schools cause concern, to ensure challenge and support is timely and effective. Interim Executive Boards have provided successful challenge and intervention to schools in serious categories of concern. This has helped to increase the pace of change and ensure robust accountability for standards and progress.

The primary school inspection profile for Flintshire has been continuously strong. Between April 2022 and July 2023, 15 primary schools in Flintshire were inspected. Judgements are no longer given by Estyn for the five inspection areas but 14 of those schools inspected required no follow up by Estyn and five schools were invited to prepare a case study for Estyn which is an indicator of highly effective practice. One primary school was placed in the statutory category of 'In Need of Significant Improvement' in September 2022. A comprehensive package of support provided by the LA and GwE is in place for the school. There are no primary schools in the statutory category of Special Measures or in Estyn Review.

Overall, the inspection profile for Flintshire secondary schools is satisfactory. Of the 11 secondary schools in the local authority, one is in the statutory category of 'In Need of Significant Improvement. One other secondary school is in the non-statutory category of Estyn Review. Both schools were inspected during the 2022 -2023 academic year. No secondary school is in the statutory category of Special Measures. The two schools that were previously in Estyn Review were successfully removed from follow up in 2022. All secondary schools have bespoke support plans in place to ensure continued improvement. Schools causing concern are subject to robust monitoring. There are 360° action plans in place when needed and highly focused support provided by both the Regional School Improvement Service, GwE and the Local Authority.

1.2 Standards and Progress of Specific Groups

Early Education Funded Provision for 3-year-olds (Early Entitlement)

Over the last three years Flintshire has averaged 488 three-year-olds per month accessing early education, known locally as Early Entitlement (EE) through a mixed provision of mostly playgroups, private day nurseries and schools. It is worth noting, however, that the financial year 2020/21 is reducing the average significantly as there were low numbers of pupils accessing early education due to the Covid-19

pandemic. Using the last two years only, the average calculates as 540 pupils.

Pupil level data on standards achieved by three-year-olds is not collected by the Local Authority. The quality of provision in the non-maintained sector is monitored regularly by the Early Entitlement Advisory Team (EET) and is quality assured by Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).

The inspection profile for Flintshire non-maintained settings is strong. Seven settings were inspected during the 2022-23 academic year. There are currently no non-maintained EE providers in a follow up inspection category. A very small number of settings have been placed in Estyn Review or Focused Improvement over the last five years and the Local Authority has demonstrated a positive track record in supporting these settings to be removed quickly.

Post-16 Learners

No performance measures, including the consistent measures for achievement and value added, are available nationally for post-16 learners. In 2022, based on destination data available to the network, 67% of students participating in the national SEREN programme for academically able students gained a place at a Russell Group University. This was an increase on 60% in the previous year. Nearly all other students took up a place at other universities or on specialist courses. It may be that some students also achieved places at Russell Group Universities but didn't register for SEREN. Some students will also have accessed SEREN provision through the Deeside Sixth provision provided by Coleg Cambria.

1.3 Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

Judgements are no longer given by Estyn for inspection areas. Between April 2022 and July 2023, fifteen primary schools, in Flintshire were inspected. None had an area relating to 'wellbeing and attitude to learning' identified as a recommendation for improvement. In addition, two schools were invited to prepare case studies for dissemination on Estyn's website which indicates highly effective practice worthy of being shared across Wales. One case study focused on how the school addresses the needs of the school community by engaging families through provision of enriching activities that support parents to develop their children's learning and wellbeing and the other was on the school's health and wellbeing provision that has a highly positive effect, especially on the most vulnerable pupils.

In the Portfolio Pupil Referral Unit and the two secondary schools inspected during this academic year, Estyn identified many strengths in the area of 'wellbeing and attitudes to learning'. However, all three schools had improving attendance as one of their recommendations. This is a reflection on the challenges still being experienced by learners in the secondary sector engaging with education following the Covid-19 pandemic and this is not an issue exclusive to Flintshire – it is a national issue.

Attendance

The ongoing impact of the pandemic makes it difficult to draw conclusions on pupil attendance and the impact of the training which has been offered to schools to support emotional health and wellbeing. (See Inspection Area 2). Whilst there is a slight increase in the attendance across the primary sector, this remains below pre-pandemic levels. Attendance at secondary level reduced to below 90% during the pandemic and this situation remained unchanged for 2012/22 (the last set of verified data) with overall attendance sitting at 87.8%. Illness remains the primary cause of absence across both sectors. Holiday absences increased significantly in the primary sector for 2021/22 as travel restrictions eased. This reflects the significant impact of the COVID-19 lockdown with many families keen to resume holiday bookings after the lockdown ceased.

Table 1: Flintshire Schools' Attendance

	Attendance (%)				Unauthorised Absence (%)			
	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
FCC Primary Schools	92.4	91.2	93.2	94.6	0.95	0.89	0.85	0.5
FCC Secondary Schools	87.8	88.5	91.6	93.3	3.19	2.56	1.87	1.7

The levels of unauthorised absence are rising, and this is reflective of the increasing level of challenge offered by headteachers to parents around pupil absence; unauthorised absence is coded where a reason has either not been provided or one that is not accepted by the headteacher. The Council has re-instated the use of other tools such as Fixed Penalty Notices to improve attendance and this is referenced in section 2 of the report.

Table 2: Spread of attendance figures

Attendance %	Primary				Secondary			
	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19
<90	10	6	4	1	9	7	0	0
90.0-90.9	6	6	0	0	0	1	0	0
91.0-91.9	7	5	4	1	2	1	1	2
92.0-92.9	10	9	5	4	0	1	3	3
93.0-93.9	12	10	12	9	0	1	3	2
94.0-94.9	16	15	19	21	0	0	3	4
95.0-95.9	3	6	15	20	0	0	1	0
96.0-96.9	0	7	4	7	0	0	0	0
97.0-97.9	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
98.0-98.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
99.0-100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Exclusions – Permanent and Fixed Term

A reduction in the level of permanent exclusion remains a priority for the Council as it is a recommendation from the LGES Inspection of 2019. However, this remains an ongoing challenge and has been exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic on learners. Officers have continued to work with schools to try and support a reduction of exclusions using initiatives such as 'Earn Your Way Back into School' and other alternative curriculum offers, but the data shows an increasing level in both fixed-term and permanent exclusion.

Table 3: Number of Permanent Exclusions from Flintshire Schools

No of permanent Exclusions				
	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
Primary	0	0	1	3
Secondary	27	10	19	24

The primary reasons for exclusion recorded during the period 21/22 (the last set of verified data) were physical assault against a pupil, verbal/threatening behaviour against an adult, persistent and disruptive behaviour and 'other'. One noticeable increase recorded was in relation to substance related issues, associated mainly with cannabis usage. A partnership approach with Sorted, the Council's Drug and

Alcohol service has been developed to provide support to learners and schools in these circumstances and North Wales Police are consulted or engaged as appropriate. There is an increasing trend of substance misuse across the county, and this is a strategic priority of North Wales Police.

The promotion of Trauma Informed Practice remains a priority for the Education & Youth Portfolio as a strategy to reduce the levels of exclusions. It is designed to improve the understanding of education practitioners of the impact of trauma on learner behaviour and to assist them in using alternative strategies to de-escalate situations and effectively engage pupils to help them to maintain their place in school. This strategy is in the initial stages of implementation and so it is too soon to formally evaluate its impact at this point.

Table 4: Fixed-Term Exclusions

Fixed Term Exclusions				
	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
	Number of incidents (Number of Pupils)	Number of incidents (Number of Pupils)	Number of incidents (Number of Pupils)	Number of incidents (Number of Pupils)
Primary 5 Days or Less	158 (18)	99 (55)	144 (70)	251 (102)
Primary Over 5 days	7 (7)	13 (12)	1 (1)	12 (10)
Secondary 5 Days or Less	1446 (716)	902 (490)	879 (405)	1188 (533)
Secondary Over 5 days	66 (53)	22 (20)	19 (18)	22 (19)
Rate of exclusion per 1000 pupils (Primary & Secondary Combined)	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
5 days or Less	73.4	54.5	43.4	61.2
Over 5 days	6	3.2	0.8	1.4

The number of managed moves across Flintshire, a strategy to give learners a fresh start in a different school, has traditionally been low with fifteen identified in the last reporting period. However, the number has increased to thirty-six this year, with the majority being in the secondary sector. The success rate of a managed move remains low at 38% and this has been an area identified for review with secondary Headteachers.

Outcome 1: Standards and Progress Summary

Areas for ongoing improvement & sustainability

- Maintain support for all schools and early years settings with the implementation of the revised curriculum
- Improve attendance rates and reduce the number of fixed and permanent exclusions through targeted interventions, bespoke educational packages and training on areas such as Trauma Informed Practice
- Maintain positive inspection outcomes across all sectors - early years, primary, secondary and specialist provision
- Support the small number of schools in follow up or statutory category to make rapid and sustained progress against their recommendations

INSPECTION AREA 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION SERVICES

2.1 Support for School Improvement

School Improvement Processes

The Council knows its schools very well. There are clear strategies, policies and processes that are understood by those involved and give a clear shape and direction to the Education Service.

The relationship and collaboration between Flintshire and the Regional School Improvement Service (GwE) is very good and similarly, relationships between GwE and schools in Flintshire are positive. Through this relationship, the Council has quality information about its schools and provides them with robust and appropriate challenge but also support and intervention. As a result, schools benefit from a diverse regional professional learning offer and bespoke support at individual school and cluster level. This can be evidenced by the improvement dialogue with schools and the strong inspection profile.

Improving performance in Key Stage 4 continues to be a priority following the last inspection. As a result, each secondary school has an agreed programme of support that helps deliver the identified priorities within a school's improvement plan. The school support plan clearly defines how school improvement resources ensure targeted improvements in key priority areas. Where required, schools are also supported by a 360° support plan which identifies enhanced support needs through LA services and GwE. These plans are monitored through the Council's Quality Board.

The Council, in partnership with GwE, has effective procedures to support schools in their self-evaluation and improvement planning. Schools are robustly challenged on the quality of their self-evaluation processes. The impact of this can be seen in the positive profile of Estyn inspections.

Schools have made effective use of the milestones provided by GwE for the reform of the Curriculum for Wales and Additional Learning Needs. This allows schools to reflect on their current position with regards to the reform journey and provides clear next steps for their consideration. Cluster work is enhanced through collaborative work and the sharing of priorities and dialogue helps capture the level of support required by schools and collaborations of schools.

Senior leaders within the service use a range of data and intelligence effectively to ensure areas of improvement are identified quickly and addressed robustly through detailed business planning. Data and information are scrutinised robustly to monitor progress against agreed actions. As a result, the Council is effective in challenging schools where needed and allocating specific support for those schools.

There is a comprehensive and well embedded professional learning offer for all schools in Flintshire and this is enhanced by what is being offered at local level by schools and between schools. There are high levels of engagement by Flintshire schools in professional learning. The offer supports school leadership at all levels across the county and has been strengthened by a range of strategies including access to regional and national development programmes. The local authority has supported the development of leadership in Flintshire schools at various levels. Subscription to the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and Aspiring Heads course is strong while existing and recently appointed headteachers are very well supported through the New and Acting headteacher programme. The impact of this has been demonstrated in the good recruitment levels at senior leadership level across Flintshire schools, even within the overall context of national challenges to recruitment and retention.

There has been a clear focus on improving teaching in Flintshire schools. The impact of this focus can be evidenced in the evaluation of practice at school and regional level and through the continued improvement in Inspection Area 3 of the Flintshire Estyn profile (Teaching). All schools have been involved in the ongoing professional development and support programme for the implementation of the new curriculum.

Primary and Secondary networks and peer-to-peer work has strengthened collaboration and led to a stronger shared understanding of effective practice. The Secondary Alliance model is embedded and has led to improved levels of collaboration between schools in sharing practice at senior and middle leadership level and in standards of teaching and learning. The Middle Leadership professional development programmes have been successful in improving the quality of leaders in core subjects, literacy and numeracy and in the foundation learning phase through development of skills and knowledge. Bespoke approaches have been tailored to meet the requirements of individual schools; coaching programmes for groups and individuals have been delivered in several schools and had a clear impact on the work of leaders. Shortages in key personnel have also been supported through the deployment of expertise from neighbouring schools.

Collaborative practice amongst leaders is reinforced through strategic forums, at both headteacher and deputy level. The Council supports strong and effective communication and a mutual sense of common responsibility for the development of responses and actions to local and national challenges. Good practice is shared and local expertise nurtured.

Schools in Flintshire are engaging well with the National Reform Journey and in developing themselves as Learning Organisations. The regional reform strategy gives clear direction on how GwE works with schools to ensure a clear and systematic approach to providing support and also provides opportunities to assist schools to reflect on their engagement with all aspects of the reform journey. As a result, primary schools in Flintshire were all able to implement the new curriculum in September 2022 and all secondary schools in September 2023.

Post-16 Education

There are six high schools in Flintshire with sixth forms and a Council partnership with one Further Education (FE) college with a dedicated A level centre. Two high schools merged their sixth forms to create Flint 6th. In 2022, there were 523 learners in Year 13 and 544 in year 12 across all school sixth form provision. 62 post-16 learners were learning through the medium of Welsh at Ysgol Maes Garmon. All school sixth forms offer the Welsh Baccalaureate, however, the number completing the full qualification differs between schools and years.

The Council continues to work closely with its six post-16 providers and in partnership with Coleg Cambria to shape post-16 provision for students and to ensure clear pathways to professional and technical routes to employment, alongside robust academic routes. The appointment of a Post-16 Learning Adviser has added additional capacity to the portfolio's work. Regular meetings of the post-16 network of schools are held to agree and review curriculum planning and local delivery. Annual plans are submitted to Welsh Government for scrutiny. The portfolio engages with the Economic Recovery Board who are keen to work with schools, particularly around developing apprenticeships.

Welsh Language Advisory Service

The portfolio's Welsh Advisory Service works in English and Welsh medium primary schools. Under

the Welsh Government's new language categorisation policy, all 59 English medium schools are defined as Category 1 schools and all 5 Welsh schools are defined as Category 3 Welsh-medium primary schools.

The Team's main objective is to contribute to Flintshire's Welsh in Education Strategy by ensuring progress in Welsh in Category 1 and Category 3 primary schools. They work in partnership with schools to improve the quality of teaching and develop the language and methodology skills of the education workforce. School Workforce Annual (SWAC) data for 2022 shows that 15% of the primary workforce (teachers and teaching assistants) have no Welsh language skills. This is a 0.5% increase from 2021.

Through a range of strategies, a targeted approach is used that includes the direct training of teachers and teaching assistants through intensive language and methodology courses and by working collaboratively with other key partners e.g. GwE, Canolfan Bedwyr (providers of the Sabbatical courses), Urdd and Menter Iaith.

The informal use of Welsh in all schools is a strategic priority. It is delivered by an appointed coordinator for Siarter Iaith (Welsh Language Charter) in Welsh medium primary and a designated person leading and co-ordinating Cymraeg Campus in English medium primary schools. All five Welsh medium primary schools in Flintshire have achieved their Gold Siarter Iaith award. The challenge is to sustain this level as part of the Covid-19 recovery. All English medium primary schools in Flintshire have embarked on their journey with Cymraeg Campus. During the last academic year, eight schools were successfully verified for the Bronze award and two for the Silver award. Thirty-one schools have now achieved the Bronze award, six schools achieved the Silver Award, one of which has now gone on to achieve the Gold Award.

In the summer term of 2023, the Welsh service organised a jamboree for foundation learners - the first for three years due to the pandemic. 74% of primary schools, including the primary special school, attended the singing festival over three days with 1,450 pupils attending.

Flintshire schools are encouraged to provide opportunities for staff to further their language training through the Welsh Government funded sabbatical courses. Numbers attending from Flintshire have been consistently high on courses across the North Wales region. Between 2020 and 2023, 20 teachers have accessed the sabbatical programme: Cymraeg Mewn Blwyddyn (Welsh in a year) – 9 teachers; Sylfaen (Foundation) – 5 teachers; Canolradd / Uwch (Intermediate/ Advanced) – 6 teachers. They continue to receive post-course support from the Welsh Advisory Service to embed their practice within their school. For September 2023, a further 7 Flintshire teachers have been allocated places on the Cymraeg Mewn Blwyddyn course; this equates to 50% of the spaces available across the North Wales region. Over the last two years the trend of teachers accessing this training has nearly doubled. The Welsh Advisory Service works closely with the course providers, delivering methodology sessions during the courses and provides focused support to staff on their return to school, with a particular aim of supporting embedding of practice across the whole school e.g. delivering training sessions to teaching assistants within their schools, becoming Flintshire verifiers for Cymraeg Campus and in some instances, becoming the cluster lead for Welsh.

One member of the Welsh Advisory Team works with Welsh medium primary schools for any newcomers who arrive in the 8-11 age group. An accelerated programme of language intervention has been developed in conjunction with the Welsh medium schools. A representative from each school has been trained to deliver the programme effectively. In 2022-2023, 15 newcomers

completed this programme. A member of the team also works closely with the Welsh secondary school supporting the 'Trochi' (Immersion) programme for Year 6 learners who transfer from English medium primary school into Welsh medium secondary, including delivering language and methodology sessions during the 4-week period in the summer term before transfer to secondary school. 18 pupils from 12 different primary schools joined the 'Trochi' programme in September 2022. The service has made effective use of the second year of the additional funding stream for Latecomers to Welsh medium education. This included a range of projects for Foundation Learning, 8–11-year-olds and Key Stage 3. Plans are well underway to provide learning facilities for the Trochi programme to operate out of the new build for Ysgol Croes Atti in Flint from 2024.

Members of the team continually evaluate their work to ensure schools receive a high-quality service, refining methods accordingly and using evidence-based practices to inform improvements, e.g., by identifying language support required as a result of the Welsh language skills section of the School Workforce Annual Census (SWAC), creating working parties of teachers refining curriculum planning for schools, identifying schools to share good practice. The team produces a monthly bulletin that provides information on professional development opportunities, celebrates success and expectations for Welsh as well as including relevant external stakeholder input. Through the highly effective cluster work for Welsh, the service can facilitate and support schools in striving to build capacity within their own settings. 1 Welsh medium and 2 English medium schools were invited by the regional school improvement service, GwE, to showcase their effective practice to teachers from across North Wales. The focus was on how Welsh language is developed within the Curriculum for Wales. These schools offered an insight into their vision for developing the Welsh language and exemplified their provision. Flintshire schools engage positively with the support offered and provide regular feedback, which informs the ongoing work of the Service.

Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and Forum

The 10-year Flintshire Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2022-2032 was approved by Welsh Government following a period of public consultation and endorsement by the Council's Cabinet and Scrutiny process. Subsequently, a 5-year action plan was also approved by Welsh Government. The implementation of the WESP is driven and monitored by the Flintshire Welsh Strategic Forum made up of officers, elected members, school representatives and other organisations linked to the development of the Welsh language and Welsh medium education. A representative from Welsh Government regularly attends meetings of the Forum. The Forum is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Welsh Language.

The Forum works very effectively as a multi-agency platform for delivering and monitoring the WESP. All members bring high levels of knowledge and expertise to the Forum which are freely shared to achieve the common vision of promoting Welsh-medium education and the Welsh language through all formal and non-formal education settings such as schools and youth settings. Most members of the Forum sit on one or more of the three sub-committees – Provision, Standards and Workforce. These meet regularly during the year to work on their specific actions within the 5-year plan and provide feedback on their progress in the following termly Forum meeting.

The Forum is robust in holding the Council to account in its delivery of the Plan and achieving the targets contained within it. The Forum's terms of reference and membership are regularly reviewed. Reports on the progress of the WESP are routinely presented to the Education, Youth and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Flintshire remains committed to build additional capacity in the Welsh Medium school network to support the WESP. Significant capital investment has been made

through the Council's capital programme and through the Sustainable Learning Communities funding to improve facilities and increase the number of Welsh medium places available.

Advanced planning is underway to review further opportunities for growth in Welsh medium schools including a new build for an existing Welsh medium school in Flint and a new start up Welsh medium school in the Buckley/Mynydd Isa area. This would deliver on the Council's key objective of having Welsh medium early years and primary school provision in every major town across the county.

School Governance Support

The governor support role within the Education Portfolio (0.2fte) sits with the role of Senior Manager for Business Support. The part time provision and support provided to governing bodies is enhanced by access to the dedicated web subscription resource and helpline provided by Governors Cymru. Exemplars of good practice/case studies from governing bodies in Flintshire can be referenced on the website.

The key functions of the service relate to supporting governing bodies, as necessary, in the following areas - Schools Causing Concern procedures; School Federations; Accelerated Improvement Boards; Interim Executive Boards; training and development, either through commissioning or direct delivery; administration of the Flintshire Governors Association; appointment of Local Authority governors to governing bodies, and securing governor nominations to the Schools Budget Forum and Education, Youth & Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Council continues to remain compliant with the statutory duty to offer the regulatory school governor training programme. The Welsh Government statutory governor training modules are available online with a commissioned external provider. This online training portal registered 192 new log-ons during the year suggesting a good level of engagement with statutory training is being maintained. Governing Bodies can monitor virtual attendance of their governors through the portal and are responsible for monitoring the impact of training on the discharge of their duties.

There continues to be commissioning of virtual training from external partners on the role of governors in safeguarding and in data protection.

The network of North Wales Governor Support Officers continues to meet virtually each term with the GWE lead for Governor Support. The network continues to share approaches and resources to support governor development. GWE offers support to individual governing bodies, when requested, through their professional learning offer. Similarly, there continues to be representation at the ADEW National network of Governor Support Officers who meet termly with representatives of Welsh Government. The Governor Development Manager (Senior Manager for Business Support) is currently the Chair of the ADEW GSO (Association Directors Education Wales, Governor Support Officers) national network, and contributor to a Welsh Government working group on the refresh of a self-evaluation resource for governing bodies.

Meetings of the Schools Budget Forum, Education and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Welsh in Education Strategic Form are held virtually and there remains consistent representation by governors.

Although there are approximately 1250 governor positions within the Authority, the Council only has responsibility for administering the nomination of Local Authority governors (circa 200) to school governing bodies. There have been no concerns raised by schools arising from governor vacancies.

2.2 Support for Vulnerable Learners

The challenges of recent years have resulted in schools developing a range of alternative offers to re-engage learners who are struggling to attend. These include:

- On-site targeted KS3 small group provision offering a range of intervention to catch up and facilitate a supported phased return to mainstream provision.
- On-site small group provision for KS4 providing an alternative curriculum offer to maintain interest and engagement.
- On-site Community Hub created to facilitate multi-agency working.
- Offsite community-based centres providing access to core subjects and more vocationally targeted opportunities and accreditation for those who are unable to access their education on the main school site.

In some cases, there have been collaborative approaches between a school and other council services, such as Youth Services, to enhance the provision on offer. These options have also been utilised to support individuals either at risk of, or those who have been excluded. This provision is being further enhanced this year by the Community Focused Schools Service which has recently been established following access to WG targeted grant funding.

Flintshire provides a suitable range of services to promote social inclusion and support for learners with ALN through a combination of internal and externally commissioned services and provision. The Council meets its statutory duties well as demonstrated by the low levels of appeal to the Education Tribunal and the low levels of young people becoming NEET.

Flintshire has operated a model of delegated funding for pupils with special educational needs/additional learning needs for several years now. The model for delegation to Primary Schools was revised ahead of the last financial year in response to the changes brought into place by the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET). This resulted in greater autonomy for schools to develop a range of universal and targeted interventions to suit the needs of their school communities. In the main, schools have welcomed the revised funding model and the ability to be more flexible in response to need. However, the increasing levels of presenting need against a backdrop of reduced budgets is resulting in additional financial pressures in some schools; responding to children with complex needs who move school in year remains a challenge, particularly within the primary sector. The models for both Primary and Secondary schools remain under review during the implementation of ALNET to ensure that funding is allocated appropriately.

Plas Derwen Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) transitioned into its new purpose-built facility in September 2021. A new headteacher took up post in September 2022 following the retirement of the previous post holder. The provision was inspected in October 2022 and placed into Estyn Review and the Council has worked closely with GwE and the headteacher to secure improvement against the recommendations ahead of the revisit in the Autumn Term 2023. Council expenditure remains higher for those pupils presenting with a range of behavioural, social and emotional needs as this continues to be the most significant area of presenting need.

Trauma-informed practice remains a priority for the Education & Youth Portfolio. Senior and middle managers within the portfolio have been supported to access the 2-day training with a further event being held alongside secondary Headteachers/senior leaders. A working group has been established with secondary schools who have identified this as a priority area and is supported by the Senior Manager Inclusion & Progression, Principal Education Psychologist and the Learning Adviser for Children who are Looked After (CLA). Further training targeted at CLA leads in schools has been organised for 2023/24.

Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

Additional capacity was allocated to the ALN team in response to the implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET). The team now comprises of a six Learning Advisers, including the Early Years ALN Lead Officer (EYALNLO) and dedicated ALN officers for Post 16 and for children who are looked after (CLA). The team is further supported by 2 seconded school Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators (ALNCos), one on a full-time basis and the other on a part-time basis. The Senior Learning Adviser for ALN manages the team and leads on the implementation of ALNET.

The Learning Advisors meet the statutory obligations in respect of children and young people with special educational and additional learning needs (SEN/ALN). Each of the core officers has a cluster group of schools and follows the pupils from entry into primary school and transition to secondary school. The change in the Council's duties in relation to Post-16 learners under ALNET led to the development of a designated officer to lead on the development of policy and process. The post holder is also the designated officer for all Post-16 individuals with ALN. The department works within clear protocols and decision-making processes to assess and make decisions regarding placement and provision for learners with ALN to ensure an equitable approach.

The Team continues to build on its achievements in relation to the first year of ALNET Implementation. The EYALNLO has provided training on ALNET, Autism and person-centred tools to a range of stakeholders including non-maintained settings, Family Support Team and Pre-school Development Team within the Health Service. 'ALNET repeat/refresher' training has also been offered to all non-maintained pre-school settings. The Early Years' Provision Map has been published, as has the Conwy & Flintshire ALN Toolkit which includes a comprehensive early years' section. This has served to develop reinforce the understanding and interpretation of the Act and particular prevalent areas of ALN.

The EYALNLO is embedded across several forums including the Flintshire Successful Pre-school Pathways project, Northeast Wales Speech & Language group, Flintshire Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership, EYALNLO regional and national meetings. This level of engagement continues to strengthen a shared understanding of process and ensure a collaborative approach. Enhanced transition from pre-school settings into school for each child known to the Council through the Pre-school Moderation Panel and Pre-school Funding Delegation Panel has been arranged and focused upon this academic year in response to the challenges experienced due to limited transition in previous years due to Covid.

Under ALNET, health professionals have a duty to notify the LA of children who are likely to have ALN. The average number of requests/Health notifications over previous 3 years (2018 – 2021) was 57 children. Last academic year (2021 – 2022) there were 102 which indicates a significant increase in identified need. The most significant area of presenting need is identified as speech, language and communication difficulties (SLCD) and is attributed the impact of the pandemic. In response to the increases in neurodevelopmental presentation, a Learning Adviser with responsibility for Autism was appointed, with the post holder taking up the position in February 2023 to provide advice, support and guidance to schools and families.

As identified above, a designated Learning Adviser for Post-16 has been appointed within the team. A Post-16 Steering Group, comprising of membership from Education and Social Services has met on a monthly basis and has formulated and agreed the processes by which the Council will discharge its duties under ALNET. Regular meetings have also been held with secondary ALNCos and representatives from Coleg Cambria to ensure that process are shared and understood and that transition arrangements are in place. This has resulted in better links between schools and the local college and improved communication as an outcome, leading to increased sharing of information prior

to transition and invitations to review meetings. The college have developed and shared a clear provision map which will inform decision making going forward and the Conwy & Flintshire Post-16 ALN toolkit is in development which will provide further support to practitioners. It is anticipated that this activity will support learners with ALN to transition more successfully into further education provision and reduce the instances of individuals becoming NEET.

The Council commenced the conversion process for Statements of Special Educational Needs to Individual Development Plans (IDPs) as per the Welsh Government timetable in September 2022. In April 2022, there were 904 children with a Statement, of which, a total of 223 statements were identified for conversion as pupils within the mandated year groups (Nursery, Reception, Years 6, 10 & 11) for the academic year 2022/23. A further 4 children in non-mandated year groups were identified for conversion following parental request. The Council committed to the approach of having a Learning Adviser in all conversion meetings to model, coach and reinforce person-centred practice. It also served to support consistency across the school network and provide support to both schools and families. This was a significant challenge in terms of capacity for the team, including pupils in both Flintshire and out of county schools. A total of 141 statement conversions were completed by April 2023 and of these, a total of only 14% were deemed to be late with permissible exceptions. It is hoped that this significant investment will support schools to be more informed and confident in implementing the process across the remaining 2 years of implementation when a further 677 Statements will require conversion.

Within the reporting period, the Council received a total of 76 referrals for Local Authority Consideration for ALN and a total of 39 requests for Reconsideration. For a Consideration, the Council has 12 weeks to determine whether a child has ALN and make decision about the additional learning provision (ALP) that the child may need. Of the 47 that have been completed so far, 94% have been completed within the timescale. The Council has a period of 7 weeks to complete the process for a Reconsideration. These are cases where the learner has an IDP and either the school or parent requests the Council to take over the responsibility for the plan and /or reconsider the ALN and ALP to be made for the individual. Of the 25 completed to date, a total of 44% have been completed within the designated timescale. Having reviewed this, it is proving extremely challenging to complete the process within the 7 weeks. Given that the Council delegates funding directly to schools to meet the needs of children with ALN including providing teaching assistant support, these children are typically very complex in nature, often requiring specialist provision. The lack of capacity within the Council's own specialist provision, which is mirrored in the independent sector, is impacting significantly on this as officers are increasingly struggling to source appropriate provision. These challenges with meeting the dictated timescales are being reported to Welsh Government and appear to be a nationwide issue.

Person-centred practice remains a high priority across the Inclusion & Progression Service with several officers delivering training to schools. ALN Learning Advisers are observing an increase in person-centred approaches by schools with communication and interaction being of a high quality; feedback from both parents and schools is that they feel more involved in the process. Flintshire has an excellent record of working professionally with parents and avoiding and resolving disagreements. Parental questionnaires that have been returned show a high level of satisfaction and the team operates a disagreement tracker to monitor cases where additional resolution is required. One appeal was lodged during the reporting period which was subsequently withdrawn by the parent during the appeal process.

The quality of one-page profiles and school IDPs remains variable with a need for more focus on developing person-centred outcomes.

Education Psychology Service (EPS)

Staffing levels within the EPS remain a concern, with the Education Psychologist (EP):pupil ratio in Flintshire remaining the most challenging in Wales according to the NAPEP-C survey in 2022. Attempts to recruit have been unsuccessful in the main, with the only option being to appoint trainee staff ahead of their completion of the EP training course. Assuming they all qualify, 3 staff have been appointed to start in September 2024. To support with the current staffing gaps, Assistant Education Psychologists (AEPs) have been recruited in the absence of fully qualified staff. This is reflective of the national picture and the lack of available qualified staff is a matter that is being raised with Welsh Government on a regular basis. The service continues to support the training course by hosting trainees in either years 1, 2 or 3. This is additional workload for the service, but it is felt to be important to the continuation of the profession and also to promote the reputation of the Flintshire team amongst new entrants to the profession and support future recruitment.

The Group Consultation model is implemented in the Primary sector and facilitates a half-termly link with every primary school in Flintshire. This forum serves to allocate the time for individual and direct work, and also serves as an adult solution circle that allows for the merging of 'expert' EP and teacher advice to generate workable and creative person-centered plans for identified children. A total of 62 meetings were held over the year, with 272 pupil consultations taking place during the group sessions. The sessions also provided the opportunity for discussion and development around a number of areas including sensory needs and processing, literacy & numeracy difficulties, social stories, Autism/social communication, accessible classrooms, emotionally based school avoidance, bereavement, divorce, self-harm and eating disorders. These are reflective of that challenges that children and schools are facing at the current time. A total of 156 consultation sessions were undertaken across the secondary and specialist sectors.

The statutory duties for EPs under ALNET have altered as compared to the previous SEN legislation. There is no longer an explicit timescale for the completion of EP work however, the timescale for the Council to complete the process of which the EP is a part, are tighter than ever and this remains a challenge to comply with as noted in the report section on ALN. The change in process can also mean that the child is potentially unknown to the service and involvement unanticipated, particularly in relation to those pupils attending a school in England. The team has worked hard to re-prioritise work at short notice to work to the ALN deadlines.

Feedback from schools suggests that EP involvement is generally valued, but that an increase in the time for individual direct work is required. This work is time consuming and is difficult to provide with the current staffing levels but has been seen to be impactful and positively rewarding for all including the EP.

Building capacity is an integral part of the service's remit. Training is generally well-received with over 90% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that the training was beneficial and informative. It is recognised that training is best received when it comes from a need identified by a school or cluster of schools, is delivered in a workshop style that allows for discussion and problem solving and followed up with check in and workshops. This model is being implemented where possible to maximise the impact of service time allocated. Examples of training offered this year are Emotion Coaching, Circle Solutions, Moving Up (support for transition) and Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) and Literacy Awareness for school.

Young Person's Counselling Service

The Young Person's Counselling Service is an integral part of the Council's support mechanism to prevent young people from becoming vulnerable. All secondary schools, including the specialist school Ysgol Maes Hyfryd and Plas Derwen (PRU) are allocated designated counsellor time. Referrals are

also taken for pupils in years 5 and 6 in primary schools and there has been increase in focus and delivery in the primary sector with group work being offered on targeted areas of need. The service has looked to broaden its offer including the use of a range of therapeutic interventions including dog therapy, creative therapies and play therapy in response to individual need. Support for exam stress has been provided and support for refugee children has also been a priority this year.

The table below outlines the level of engagement of the service over the year. This clearly demonstrates a significant increase in need with the team supporting almost double the number of clients and utilising the group work model where appropriate to support an increased level of engagement. Similar to previous years, anxiety and family issues remain the main reasons for engagement with the service, with anger matters being seen as more prevalent for the first time. The support from the Council's services in response to this will be considered via the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Forum to identify what further training/intervention could be offered.

Table 5: Number of clients and presenting issues

	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Number of Clients	547	308	226
Number of sessions attended	3651	1351	933
Presenting issues on referral (3 most common in rank order high to low)	Anxiety Family Anger	Anxiety Family Bereavement	Family Anxiety Behaviour related

All young people engaging with the Counselling service undertake an initial assessment (YP-Core) and this is repeated at the end of the intervention to measure impact. The information below shows that on average, the young people acknowledge a positive outcome following engagement with the sessions. It is notable that the initial scores are increasing indicating a higher level of individual need on engagement which is likely to be reflective of the pandemic legacy.

Table 6: Impact of the Young Person's Counselling Service

	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Changes in the average result of the Young People's Core Score - Start of Episode	20.84	18.57	17.28
Changes in the average result of the Young People's Core Score - End of Episode	11.81	9.57	8.86

The service has also offered wellbeing coaching to adults this year linked to the Welsh Government InReach support programme. This has been delivered alongside coaching and support for Headteachers and staff who sadly have had to respond to a serious incident, i.e. the death of a pupil, member of staff or someone closely linked to the school community. Schools have been appreciative of the support provided in these very difficult situations.

Sensory Service

During this reporting year the service has expanded to include delivery to Conwy County Council alongside Denbighshire, Wrexham and Flintshire. The service has continued to support schools to meet the educational and emotional needs of Flintshire's sensory impaired pupils - 82 pupils with a visual impairment (VI) and 125 with hearing impairments (HI). Support for families of pre-school

children remained a key priority for the service during the year. There were 15 pre-school children with HI and 8 with VI provided for by the team. The service continued to use national eligibility criteria to determine the level of involvement. The Covid pandemic has impacted on this particular cohort with delays in medical procedures relating particularly to hearing impairment increasing the number of referrals to the service. Caseloads have been adjusted to ensure that all eligible pupils continued to access the service.

The continued aim of the service is to build capacity within schools/placements in supporting children and young people with sensory impairment. Bespoke packages were offered at both a county and school level and 18 schools/settings were offered virtual training via Microsoft TEAMS in Flintshire with good/excellent feedback received.

During the reporting period, there were no pupils with a sensory impairment excluded from Flintshire schools. A very small number of those with a visual impairment had significantly low attendance due to medical conditions which impacted on their ability to attend school. The service provided advice and support to establish the root cause of the absence and also support a phased return or access to alternative provision as required. There were 13 pupils with a sensory impairment in year 11 (11 pupils) and Year 13 (2 pupils) in 2021/22. All pupils went on to a positive outcome either at a school, local college, through an apprenticeship or university.

The Service has been an integral part of the Council's response to ALNET, working closely with the ALN Team. The Learning Adviser has been part of on-going national discussions regarding the application of the ALN Code for children and young people with a sensory impairment where there remains a level of confusion around the definition of additional learning provision.

Feedback from Additional Learning Needs Coordinators indicated a positive response to the service interventions, with 92% indicating that the written advice/reports provided were clear and helped staff to meet the pupil's needs. Similarly, 92% indicated that input from the team facilitated the pupil to access the curriculum. All schools felt that the team had communicated well with them and that team members had behaved in a professional manner. A total of 75% of the respondents felt that staff in their school had received appropriate training and/or advice to help them meet the overall sensory needs of the pupils.

Communication & Language Advisory Support Service

The impact of the Covid pandemic remains evident in a number of areas, but noticeably so with regards to speech, language and communication skills, with an increasing level of concern being flagged by schools particularly in relation to pre-school and Foundation Learning. Flintshire was the first council in Wales to offer training to all schools on Early Talkboost (age 3-4) and Talkboost (age 4-7) programmes and the roll out of this to all primary schools has continued in response to increased levels of presenting need. As of March 2023, 55 schools (40 schools March 2022) have been trained in one or both interventions, resulting in a total of 360 trained staff across the school network, an increase of 72 from last year.

The programme provides the facility for schools to record pre and post intervention data which can be shared with officers. The tables below indicate the percentage improvements in each of the intervention areas prior to and following the intervention.

Table 7 Early Talkboost Impact

	Attention and listening	Understanding words & sentences	Speaking	Personal social and emotional skills
% at expected level before intervention	19	31	15	9
% at expected level after intervention	34	49	29	32

The social impact of the pandemic is evident through the low initial scores in the areas of social skills, along with the other more formal skills associated with academic development, i.e. sentence structure and storytelling. It is pleasing to see that all areas demonstrate a positive impact. Initial pupil assessments indicated 33% of the early Talkboost cohort and 39% of the Talkboost group were working below their age expected level and would require further intervention and/or a referral for speech therapy intervention demonstrating a significant level of need. Following access to the programme, these levels reduced to 19.8% and 10.7% respectively.

Table 8 Talkboost Impact

	Understanding spoken language	Understanding & using vocabulary	Sentences	Storytelling & narrative	Social interaction
% at expected level before intervention	12	21	9	2	7
% at expected level after intervention	35	30	14	7	12

Given the success of the programmes and ongoing presenting need, officers are considering offering training on the programme for KS2 pupils.

The service has continued to provide outreach to individual pupils demonstrating a significant level of need. This is delivered in collaboration with the Health Service. The number of pupils requiring this intervention has increased from 45 last year, to 54 this year. Of these, 22 have been discharged from the service due to either the good progress made, the need for referral to alternative service or access to specialist educational provision in the primary/secondary Resource bases. Destination data for the secondary Resource shows a strong positive trend for pupils moving successfully on to a positive Post-16 outcome.

The Language Development project has also continued to operate. This is a centrally funded project which is based around a 'planted' adult model and bases trained teaching assistants in schools demonstrating a high level of need either for monolingual pupils or those with English as an additional language. This is a time limited intervention (a term and a half) and schools are asked to rate the impact. A total of 34 schools were supported in the academic year 2021/22. The following average ratings were received regarding the impact of the intervention (scoring 0-5, with 5 being the maximum):

- Effectiveness of planted adult model 4.77
- Impact on pupils' language and communication skills 4.15
- Impact on staff understanding of how to support skill development 4.54

The project uses a 10-point scale to measure pupil progress. During this period the average starting score of pupils was 3.67, whilst the average post project score was 5.19, showing an average increase of 1.52 language development points, clearly demonstrating the positive impact of the strategy.

Support for English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Gypsy Travellers

The number of pupils identified as EAL continues to rise with a further increase of 81, taking the total this year to 1572. All pupils are assessed against a 5-point scale (A – E) with regards to their language capabilities and appropriate support allocated either on an individual or group work basis. Those identified as being at stage A are new to English/Welsh whilst those at stage E are deemed to be fluent. Those at stages A and B are prioritised for direct intervention from the service and the following table shows the number of pupils over the last 3 years:

Table 9 EAL Stage A & B Overview

Pupils at Stage A & B	2023	2022	2021
Primary	631	625	620
Secondary	104	100	89
Total	735	725	709

The number of languages spoken across the county has increased from 53 to 57 this year. A total of 158 pupils (Year 1 – Year 11) arrived in Flintshire between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023. This is an increase of 50 pupils compared with the previous year and can be related directly to the impact of the Ukrainian Sponsorship Scheme, with 57 of the new arrivals coming from Ukraine.

Flintshire Council has responded positively and pro-actively to the three refugee schemes, namely the Ukrainian Sponsorship Scheme (UKSS), The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS). As of April 2023, the number of pupils in Flintshire schools as a result of these schemes sits at 84 Ukrainian, 29 Afghan and 19 Syrian children. Schools have responded extremely positively and welcomed pupils and their families into their school communities. This has been facilitated by the significant support offered via the EAL team and the coordination by the Learning Adviser who ensured a harmonised response across the Education & Youth Portfolio. This ensured that school admissions and access to transport were implemented in a timely manner and that additional support both at a pupil and parental level could be accessed from other relevant services and agencies; it was a notable achievement that all Ukrainian children entering Flintshire had been placed and attended school at the start of the 2022/23 academic year.

The Inclusion & Progression Service is increasing its use of data to support greater evaluation of need/impact. Attendance data is now generated for several potentially vulnerable groups including EAL. Attendance for this group is largely in line with the overall Flintshire pupil average. It was noted that over the winter months, some pupils, particularly those from Ukraine were being kept off from school for minor ailments such as a cold. This was because of different cultural expectations. Conversations took place with the families to explain the process and expectations within Wales to ensure that pupils were not absent unnecessarily.

The service EAL stakeholder questionnaires indicated that of the 287 pupil responses, 98% felt happy and safe in school at least some of the time. It is also pleasing that all of the 58 parents who responded feel comfortable talking to their child's class teachers. Where parents or children have indicated that they do not feel happy or safe, the main reasons seem to be around a lack of friendship

groups, thus emphasising the importance of buddy schemes and other collaborative learning and play opportunities for our EAL pupils. The surveys provide important information regarding service impact but also allow the team to follow up on information relating to matters of concern to pupils and parents.

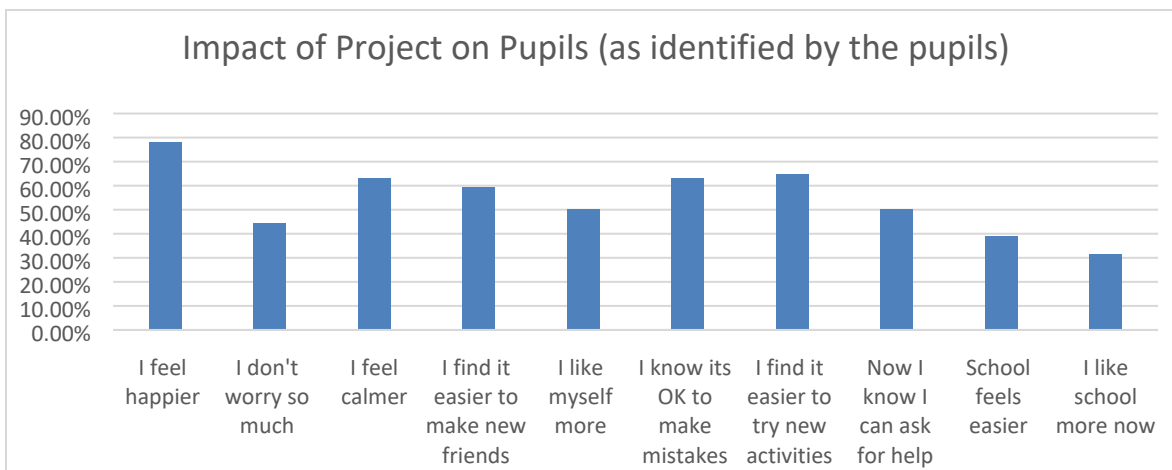
The school questionnaire, completed by 250 teachers, indicated that over 90% of EAL pupils are perceived to be making appropriate progress with their spoken language, but there is less confidence when the same scoring is applied to written work. This is to be expected as oral language skills often develop more quickly than written skills. Unfortunately, limited capacity within the EAL service has meant that direct intervention from the team for pupils with regards to writing skills is not possible, so advice and support is being provided to class teachers as an alternative.

The Traveller community remains an incredibly transient, with numbers altering on a weekly basis across Flintshire. As of March 2023, the number had dropped from 166 to 148 for the same time period in 2022. There has however, been an increase in the comparative number of pupils on the caseload with whom the service has engaged, increasing from 196 for 2021/22 to 206 for 2022/23. The figures across the Primary sector reflect a strong level of engagement, with parents choosing to send their children to school. There is a different picture across the Secondary sector despite the offer of enhanced transition, alternative education opportunities, regular home visits and support for schools. The implementation of the Curriculum for Wales is also proving to be a challenge around school engagement, with regards to the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) element of the curriculum. The Traveller Community holds strong cultural views which means that access to the RSE curriculum in the model of delivery planned is causing such levels of concern that they are considering the withdrawal of their children from school. Officers are working with Welsh Government, schools and the community to seek a form of resolution.

During the year, the service welcomed 34 new Traveller pupils to the county, all of which were allocated school places or alternative education provision along with transport. Monitoring of attendance data has shown an average attendance of 69.9% for the Autumn Term 2022 and 73.3% for the Spring Term 2023 which sits noticeably below the wider Flintshire averages of around 90%. This remains an area of priority for improvement. Nationally verified exclusion levels for Traveller children were above the average for other ethnic groups for the academic year 2021/22 with a loss of 66.5 school days in total. Local figures for the period from September 2022 to April 2023 shows a reduction to 23 days, which is positive.

A programme of alternative provision has been implemented again this year focusing on pupils who may be considered vulnerable and has included a number of Traveller pupils. The provision is targeted at KS2 and KS3 and continued to operate with a focus on developing a sense of community, belonging and self-worth alongside skill development. The pupils were asked to rate themselves against the key criteria below having engaged with the provision. A total of 82 pupils responded and the table indicates the percentage of the group who felt there had been a positive impact in the designated area having engaged with the alternative provision. The overall positive impact was corroborated by the data collected from schools who noted that 65% of pupils put forward for engagement showed an improvement in the level of engagement in lessons, 42% had an improvement in their general behaviour and 48% showed an improvement in their self-confidence levels.

Table 10: Impact of Alternative Provision



The ongoing reluctance of the Traveller community to engage with education at a secondary level, in particular past Year 9, has resulted in the service offering an alternative model of engagement. The primary aim of the activity is to try and reintegrate pupils either back into mainstream education, or if this is not possible, into further education at the end of Year 11. A range of activities have been offered including boxing, Aura sports' course, hair and beauty and cooking courses. Of the 24 Traveller pupils engaged, 4 returned to school, with the remainder maintaining their engagement with the activities. Of those in Year 11, 7 out of the 8 transferred into a Post-16 outcome and reflects the positive impact of the team on both the pupils and their families.

Support for raising the educational achievement of Children who are Looked After (CLA)

The levels of children who are 'looked after' have remained fairly stable over the past 3 years, 263 in 2020, 258 in 2021 and 255 in 2022. The number of those children who are of statutory school age varies year on year - 157 in 2022 compared with 178 in 2021. The majority of CLA are educated in Flintshire maintained provision (68%), with the remainder accessing their education in out of county maintained provision or specialist independent settings. This compares with 70% in the previous year. The data for 2022 shows an increase in the number of children being taken into care in the primary age range with a noticeable reduction of secondary aged pupils going into care. This may be a result of the multi-systemic team (MST) approach that is being implemented within Children's Services and supports those on the edge of care to remain at home which tends to focus on the secondary age range.

Specific funding to support improved outcomes for 'looked after' children comes in the form of the Pupil Development Grant which is overseen by GwE at a regional level. Schools are required to operate in clusters and bid for funding, with the bids being overseen by local officers. This year, the funding has been targeted at a range of training and interventions, including:

- Development of a Sensory Room
- Forest School
- Equine Therapy
- Additional Maths and English tutoring

The Digital Development Portrait screening tool was used with the CLA cohort with the purpose of getting a baseline measure against areas such as Concentration and Focus, Sensory Needs, Social Skills and Emotional Resilience. This enabled education practitioners to understand strengths and areas in need of support/development. The training for staff using the tool has also included information on the neuroscience behind trauma and brain development to facilitate greater understanding of the impact of trauma and the positive strategies that can be undertaken to support

development. The service is has also undertaken significant work in relation to the Welsh Government virtual school model. This has identified several priorities for improvement and work is underway to explore these with colleagues in Children's Services.

Attendance data for the CLA cohort is 85.5%, compared with 87% for the previous year. Exclusion levels are high with a total of 229.5 days being lost to education. This information has fed into the Council's decision to focus on supporting and developing trauma-informed practice across our schools with the aim of improving understanding of the impact of trauma and suitable strategies to implement to reduce the need for exclusion. The destination data for Year 11 pupils who are 'looked after' indicated that 85% of the cohort went on to access a Post-16 placement compared with 69% in the previous year.

Engagement Services

The Council has a number of services which support and promote engagement, including the Education Welfare Service, Progression Team and Community Focused Schools. There have been several changes made to this area during the reporting period. This has included a review of the EOTAS Panel which now operates as decision making body as opposed to a monitoring remit. The Inclusion & Progression Service saw the cessation of the TRAC programme which had been a European Social Funded provision to support engagement but also saw the development of a Community Focused School Service funded by Welsh Government (WG).

Education Welfare Service (EWS)

The structure of the EWS was reorganised from September 2022 to differentiate the roles between the Education Support Officers (ESO) and the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) with regards to attendance matters. ESOs have been allocated all of the primary school referrals leaving more operational time for the EWO staff based in the secondary schools to respond to the more complex issues. In addition, ESOs have supported several primary schools with regards to attendance systems, processes and monitoring to ensure all attempts are made to maximise attendance. ESOs have made regular visits to conduct attendance meetings with Headteachers and advise on the graduated response to attendance. The responsibility for safeguarding matters in primary schools remains with the more senior EWOs.

Regular profiling of attendance data is now in place within the service to confirm schools in need of support. A positive example of this targeted work is the improvement from 76.8% to 86.2% for one of our primary schools for the academic year 2021/22. The ESO provided a dedicated audit and support for the school's attendance officer and the school is now employing the graduated response to attendance resulting in the positive change. Transition between Year 6 and 7 was also identified as a priority following a review of the data. An initial pilot working with pupils with attendance below 85% in one of the high schools was implemented which resulted in an overall improvement in attendance levels and will be targeted across all schools in the future.

The service has commenced the implementation of fixed penalty notices (FPN) and court proceedings as appropriate, following the guidance on this from WG. A designated ESO has been allocated to administer the FPN process to ensure compliance; any unpaid fines were referred for legal action and resulted in either a fine ranging from £120 to £811 or a conditional discharge in one instance. The cases progressed to date have been cases with chronic levels of non-attendance and the impact of this has been variable. It is anticipated that this ongoing action will lead to a greater awareness of parents of their duties with regards to school attendance and possible consequences, leading to increased levels of engagement in the coming years.

Elective Home Education (EHE)

In line with other councils, Flintshire continues to see an increase in the numbers of children becoming EHE with 178 children registered in January 2023 compared with 91 in 2018. The lead

officer for EHE is actively engaging in the national meetings and is working in collaboration with other regional leads to develop a co-ordinated approach across North Wales. The additional funding received from Welsh Government has enabled the appointment of a designated officer for EHE who provides information and advice and engages proactively with parents who wish their child to be educated at home. An information pack is circulated and annual visits are undertaken as part of the monitoring process. Officers work closely with colleagues across Social Services as required where safeguarding is deemed to be a concern and work proactively to secure a return to school where this is considered to be in the child's best interests. A total of 27 children returned to school-based education in the period January 2022 to January 2023. This compares with 26 in the previous year indicating there is a consistent drive to promote and support re-engagement at any point within a child's educational career.

Community Focused Schools (CFS)

Flintshire received funding to support the implementation of the Community Focused Schools initiative. The decision was taken to retain the funding centrally and develop a team to target the areas with the highest levels of deprivation. Two managers have been appointed along with 6 Family Engagement Workers. The areas of Saltney, Holywell and Queensferry have been identified for access to this intervention. A community hub has been established in St David's High School to support collaboration between the school and the service. This service is in its infancy but it is hoped that it will contribute to an increase in attendance levels in the targeted areas.

Progression Team

The Engagement Progression Coordinator (EPC) works with a range of partners to co-ordinate support for pupils between the ages of 11 and 18 who are potentially at risk of disengagement or are currently not in education, employment or training (NEET). The EPC manages the Progression Team who support the potential NEETS. The team receive referrals for pupils who are starting to, or have disengaged from education from Education Welfare Officers or schools. The EPC also facilitates links with other relevant services such as Youth Justice, Sorted Drug and Alcohol Team and the Young Person's Counselling Service.

Home visits are made by the Progression Team to build rapport and explore the pupils' interests and needs. This engagement work supports pupils to participate in a range of alternative education activities. Support for transition between school and Post-16 provision remains a priority for the team. A total of 250 individuals were supported during the reporting period. The majority (75%) of these individuals were on roll at a school but struggling to engage due to high levels of anxiety and/or presenting behaviours. The service supports individuals to access a range of accreditation to support their transition into adulthood. These include a range of Aged qualifications in areas such as Mental Health & Wellbeing, Independent Living Skills and understanding Healthy Relationships, ASDAN Hair & Beauty, a range of Essential Skills and Sports/Coaching awards. The Prince's Trust Achieve awards have also been accessed in areas such as Personal Development and Employability. Of the 48 Year 11 learners who engaged with the team, all progressed to a positive Post-16 outcome, either in the form of further training or employment.

The level of year 11 NEET has remained low over the past 4 years as a result of the targeted multi-agency work across the authority, underpinned by the work of the EPC and the Progression Team.

Table 11: Year 11 Leavers (%) from schools in Wales known to be not in education, employment or training (NEET)

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Flintshire	1.7 (28)	1.4 (23)	1.2 (19)	1.9 (28)
Wales	2.1 (664)	1.6 (507)	1.7 (527)	1.8 (537)

Table 12: Year 12 and 13 Leavers (%) in Flintshire known not to be in education, employment or training (NEET)

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Flintshire Year 12	1.2 (7)	0.3 (2)	1.1 (6)	0
Wales Yr 12	0.7 (80)	0.4 (55)	0.6 (76)	0.8 (99)
Flintshire Year 13	2.9 (16)	3.4 (19)	3.7 (20)	2.9 (16)
Wales Yr 13	2.8 (322)	2.3 (251)	3.5 (355)	2.5 (269)

Source: Careers Wales

Emotional Health and Wellbeing

Flintshire has an established multi-agency Emotional Health and Wellbeing forum to oversee and guide its response to emotional health and wellbeing. The group is chaired by the Principal Education Psychologist and the forum identifies training needs and prioritises the allocation of the WG Wellbeing grant. The Council continues to promote and develop a relational approach to practice and intervention across its services and schools. Training on Trauma Informed Practice for the Council's senior and middle managers in the Education & Youth Portfolio has taken place and this was also accessed by some secondary Headteachers and senior leaders. A secondary focus group has also been established to further promote and embed this practice across our schools.

Feedback from the training has been positive with a high percentage of participants indicating that the courses offered would lead to a positive impact on their work with children. The Education Psychology Service leads on the supervision/follow up support with the aim of developing and embedding practice. Following the circulation of the Serious Incident policy and the sad need for schools to respond to a number of tragic scenarios, the need for additional training on suicide was identified and delivered as outlined below. The ELSA programme remains a training priority, with a number of additional staff engaging in the training programme which will complete at the end of the academic year 2022/23.

Table 13: Training offered to support Emotional Health & Wellbeing

Training/support	Number of staff trained
ELSA Supervision	80
Emotion Coaching (schools) (PRU) (Welsh Medium)	161 30 7
Emotionally Based School Avoidance	1 high school staff team
Child Bereavement UK: Supporting Children Bereaved by Suicide (2 training day offers)	31
Introduction to the Establish Maintain Restore Relational Approach Model Training Plas Derwen	All staff 30
Nurture Programme Sylvia Lucas	42
Whole School Nurture Approach for Learning Training	6 schools in total
Feelings Detectives	29

In September 2021 the Education Portfolio introduced the 'Challenging Bullying online reporting system' for Flintshire schools. This was developed by Flintshire IT and hosted on the 'Flintshire Workspace' platform. It enables schools to report incidents of bullying, including racist incidents, on an online form and maintain these in one place and update as required. 'Challenging Bullying' sits alongside health and safety incident reporting on the platform and staff illness absence. Designated officers have access to this data which enables the Education Portfolio to maintain an overview of recorded bullying incidents in order to identify emerging trends or groups being discriminated against, monitor exclusion rates. Long term, as the system embeds, the aim is that the data will show progress towards the Council's equality objectives.

Early Help Hub (EHH)

In early 2017 the Flintshire Public Service Board (PSB) commissioned the establishment of an Early Help Hub to support the delivery of more timely and appropriate early intervention and support for families with greater needs. There were multiple drivers for this including the introduction of the Social Service and Wellbeing Act 2014, the CSSIW inspection report recommendations about prioritising early intervention, intervening earlier at lower cost and for better outcomes and the extent to which so many cases being referred and re-referred to Children's Services did not meet thresholds for a statutory intervention, notwithstanding that the families often presented with persistent challenges.

Since inception in 2017 Flintshire's Early Help hub model has continued to develop and adapt to the ever-changing circumstances and landscape of support needed across the county. The Early Help Hub is now a well-established provision prioritizing early intervention for families, receiving approximately 12,611 referrals since inception, the highest proportion being request for support for families with a 10–15-year-olds. There are a total of 16 agencies including health, education, police, housing and third sector representatives participating in hub discussions and actioning support to ensure families receive services at the point struggles start to emerge in their family journey.

All services participating utilise the Paris system to record information allowing quick escalation if a concern comes to light as part of hub information gathering and an efficient step-down process for families where child protection is not the most appropriate route. This has dramatically decreased the number of 'No Further Action' decisions (NFA's) and all families receive an offer of support. Recent work through Vanguard has united and streamlined the 'front door' processes for Children's Services and Early Intervention and work is currently being undertaken to ensure a what matters conversation is held with families at the point of referral, ensuring the families voice is at the heart of any decision-making process. To further develop family voice in late 2022 a series of workshops were set up with partner agencies alongside senior management, parents and young people to see if we could integrate some of our colleagues (the experts) into a single front door which support families by identifying needs (What Matters) upon entry into children's services and without delay.

The Information Advice and Assistance Service provides a swift response in supporting our front door statutory partners, including schools, police, health and early years to fulfil the role when families are requiring support when thresholds are not met from statutory resource. The IAA Service was developed in late 2022 and became operational in February 2023. The Information, advice and assistance service (IAA) is providing support to families through skilled conversations which will clarify people's thoughts and explore their dilemmas to understand "What Matters" most to them and how best to help them.

Referrals that do not meet threshold for safeguarding will be passed to IAA Service. Each representative will contact the family to explore their dilemmas to understand "What Matters" to them and how best to help them by giving information, providing advice or providing assistance.

Nominated staff from the Education and Youth portfolio have remained a consistent and integral part of the offer, evolving from one education representative to the current inclusion of the Education Welfare Team. This has facilitated a wider dissemination of the knowledge shared as part of the process to schools and their wider partners and enabled comprehensive sharing of information. The team disseminate valuable information about families and their needs enabling an appropriate and effective support package to be identified, as well as providing a valuable conduit to support often linking families and encouraging engagement with the identified services. All referrals receive an action, whether that be a single service provision, multiple service or voluntary sector information support. This is an innovative and highly effective model of support that is having a tangible impact on children and families.

2.3 Other Education Support Services

Funded Part Time Early Years Provision – Early Entitlement

Flintshire has a long tradition of supporting early years' education and during 2022-23 had 45 non-maintained settings registered to deliver part time, early education for three-year-olds and 32 schools supporting 710 children in total. Provision is for 10 hours of funded education per week.

Despite the removal of the grant conditions by Welsh Government to provide '10%' teacher time for funded settings and reducing central resources, the Council continues to maintain appropriate levels of support to settings registered for early education delivery to ensure high quality standards of provision, which in turn leads to better outcomes for learners. A central team of early years specialists work across the settings to provide targeted role modelling of teaching, to develop quality learning environments and support setting staff to produce robust self-evaluation reports and improvement action plans.

The core team is also supported in this delivery by several early years' teachers in schools, funded by the Council, where the local playgroup is the main feeder into the school nursery class. Initially developed as a strategy to maintain delivery in the face of reducing budgets and recruitment restrictions, there have been other intended benefits of this approach such as improved transition arrangements for pupils and sharing of best practice. However, the school-based teachers have acknowledged their reliance on the Council's core EE team who are real experts in provision for 3-year-olds. All support teachers produce pre-inspection reports on settings and assist with post-inspection action plans. Where settings require follow up after an inspection, particularly in the more significant categories, then the level of support is increased.

The Council still has sufficient capacity to deliver the number of early education places required. As an early implementer of the Welsh Government's 30-hour Free Childcare Offer, many settings have registered as joint providers so this additional funding provides some mitigation in the sector. The Welsh Government acknowledged the pressure on settings to maintain a combined delivery of early years' education and childcare with a difference in funding rates. This resulted in WG using Flintshire as a pilot authority for the provision of additional funding to equalise the rates of payment.

Flintshire continues to work closely with Mudiad Meithrin, the Welsh-medium early years' organisation, to develop new Welsh language provision in key geographical locations in the county as part of its Welsh in Education Strategy (WESP). There is currently sufficient capacity to deliver Welsh medium early years' education, but the aim is to increase this as a stepping stone to more children accessing their full-time education in a Welsh medium school and support the WG target of 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050. A new Cylch developed by Mudiad Meithrin opened in May 2019 in Buckley and this is part of a longer-term strategy through the WESP and WG capital funding schemes to create a new Welsh medium primary school provision in the Buckley/Mynydd Isa area.

The Early Years Pupil Development Grant (EYPDG) continues to be used by the Early Entitlement Team (EET) for the professional development of the non-maintained workforce with a focus on strengthening staff impact on the engagement, well-being and performance of disadvantaged learners.

The support provided for an EE child with developmental delays or difficulties traditionally takes place within the setting. The EET offer advice to setting staff on strategies that they can use with the child. Support for children with developmental delays or difficulties is an area which the EET is focusing on in partnership with Childcare Services and the Inclusion Service in order to create a more integrated process for requesting and receiving support under the new ALNET Act (Wales).

The EE Service has increased the ALNCo's level of involvement with setting staff and the impact has been that there are now more structured approaches to offering strategies for supporting individual EE children identified as having particular needs. Feedback on this increased specialised input indicates that staff feel the strategies are having a positive impact on the child/children's engagement in learning.

The EET works in partnership with Flying Start, the Childcare Development Team and the Inclusion Service to agree an ALN training programme for the non-maintained sector. EET work cooperatively with Social Services teams to identify a range of resources suitable for supporting children's speech, language and physical skills. EET worked in partnership with the Early Years Pathfinder Project to identify opportunities for extending good practice in Flying Start settings into EE settings which resulted in the piloting of 'Wellcomm' - a speech and language screening tool.

Regionally the EET continues to work in partnership with other North Wales EE Teams and the EE Team Leader attends local and regional meetings supporting ALN transformation work. On a national level EET members continue to support the work of Estyn through their stakeholder meetings and support Welsh Government's working parties on the implementation of the new curriculum and assessment arrangements.

The non-maintained sector continues to experience a high turnover of staff, and this is being exacerbated by the national difficulty in recruiting childcare workers. The Early Entitlement Team are regularly providing training to some staff with no prior knowledge of how to meet the demands of education, rather than solely childcare provision, as well as providing professional development in the delivery of a new curriculum and assessment arrangements.

Over the last few years, the focus of the Early Entitlement team's training has been on supporting non-maintained settings with the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales. Since January 2022 the focus has more specifically been on the delivery of the 'Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings'. The team completed three evaluation reports to Welsh Government (January 2022, May 2022 and January 2023) focusing on the progress being made with the implementation of Curriculum for Wales in funded non-maintained nursery settings within Flintshire. As part of this, Flintshire was asked to write a case study on its support for non-maintained settings to be shared across Wales and published on Hwb.

The Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards (RRRS) Grant provided by Welsh Government for the non-maintained sector since 2021 and administered by the local authority, enabled the Early Entitlement Team to fund training delivered by experts in the field of early years, to provide release costs for staff attendance at training and to purchase high quality resources which support the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales. The grant also enabled Early Entitlement to fund professional learning hours for staff supporting funded education in settings. Feedback from Flintshire settings is that this has been a very valuable use of the funding and that staff's understanding of the new curriculum has increased because of this additional capacity and access to

professional development

Early Entitlement Teams across North Wales have a strong history of working in partnership and in autumn 2022 agreed a joint approach to piloting the draft assessment arrangements in non-maintained funded settings. The final arrangements were released in July 2023 and Flintshire will support settings to implement these during the next academic year.

Integrated Youth Provision – Youth and Play Services including Play Sufficiency

Play services have been embedded into Flintshire's Integrated Youth Provision (IYP) since 2017. The Council has a strong tradition of providing safe spaces and quality play opportunities for young children during summer holidays. This also includes Welsh language provision. The service has an excellent track record in partnership working with over 30 Town and Community Councils to deliver these quality play schemes in over 50 locations. In 2022, 3975 children attended a scheme recording 15,556 total attendances. The schemes also offer employment for the young Flintshire workforce (Majority aged 18 – 25) and supports the workforce development target for the Council. Over the past 12 months the Play and Youth teams have been establishing more sustainable and long-term play provision, focussing on transition activity.

Flintshire County Council upholds Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 which places a statutory duty on all local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children, and to consider the many aspects of community life that affect play opportunities e.g. use of the environment; traffic and transport; play and leisure provision, and parental and community involvement with play. Flintshire is effective in adhering to the statutory guidance, 'Wales – A Play Friendly Country'.

In early 2023 the executive summary of the latest play sufficiency assessment was produced along with a self-assessment and action plan. In order to move the plan to action a multi-agency strategic group will need to be formed and will be a key action for 2023-24.

The play development delivery staff continue to engage a range of statutory and non-statutory partners and this has enhanced the inclusive range of opportunities, such as working specifically on traveller sites to provide and enhance play opportunities as well as continuing successful programmes such as Kicks for Kids Football, Shed Project Play, Forest Schools and a drama project with Theatr Clwyd Cymru.

To improve monitoring and performance, the registration and general administration for the summer programme has been switched online, thus allowing for efficient reporting against key indicators as well as swift communication with key partners such as Corporate Health and Safety and Town and Community Councils.

The Integrated Youth Provision Team deliver a diverse range of targeted and open access activities across Flintshire, both directly, and through working in collaboration with a range of statutory, non-statutory and voluntary organisations. Core council funding for the service is supplemented by Welsh Government grant funding streams e.g. Youth Support Grant and Families First Grant.

The service delivers traditional club-based activity as well as detached youth work, school immersion work, Welsh language provision, homelessness prevention, a Forest School, Duke of Edinburgh Scheme, a Resilience Programme, LGBTQ+ Youth Club and the Youth Council. The provision of digital services will continue to be developed to enhance the service and to ensure that all young people have access to support. In an average month the service records over 1900 attendances delivering 278 hours of provision.

Provision for youth services is planned in conjunction with partners, such as Aura Leisure and Libraries, NEWCIS Young Carers, the Urdd and Theatre Clwyd. The service has been innovative in supporting Aura staff to upskill and achieve Level 2 and 3 youth work qualifications as part of the doorstep sport provision and is currently co-designing a bespoke introduction to youth work course for local clubs and organisations working with young people. The service has provided grants to partners to support delivery across Flintshire and/or, for the benefit of Flintshire residents e.g. to Newcis Young Carers. The service also supports the Inspire Project in partnership with Wrexham County Borough Council to provide bespoke youth support services those young people who self-harm or are at risk of suicide ideation. There is a longstanding partnership with Theatr Clwyd which has resulted in powerful interactive drama opportunities for young people to explore key issues such as consent.

Internally, regular meetings occur with the Youth Justice Service and Sorted (Drug and Alcohol Team), to share insights and maximise resources, as well as with other partnerships e.g. groups commissioned via the Families First funding. IYP is also a key member of the Flintshire VARM/ASB partnership, a multi-agency group tasked with identifying and reducing anti-social behaviour and police demand through a collaborative approach. This enables the service to effectively target its intervention work through its detached work team in particular communities as needs arise.

In the past 12 months refugees from both Afghanistan and the Ukraine have attended the Forest School provision-and have taken part in a range of activities and created networking and social opportunities for young people and also their parents/carers.

Wrexham Glyndwr University have temporarily paused their degree programme for new students. Although this will not have an immediate impact on the service, it has the potential to be damaging in the medium term with the natural turnover and anticipated growth of the service. The Senior Manager will take an active role in the reinvigoration of the degree ensuring that it meets the needs of the industry. Level 2 and 3 qualifications continue to be delivered primarily through Adult Learning Wales and the service has continued to support new staff through this route. To improve our local service, we are in the process of training an in-house tutor. In early 2023 IYP successfully recruited two Youth Work apprentices.

The Youth Service previously held the overall Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) Licence and has now worked successfully with schools to support all 12 of Flintshire's secondary schools and the Pupil Referral unit to take out their own licence. The Youth Service will continue to operate their own licence for the Silver and Gold Award as well as supporting Aura Leisure. Being able to offer the Gold Award is a focus for the forthcoming year.

Young people's voices are continuously canvassed and the service has amended its provision where appropriate to reflect their opinions. The service has been as flexible and reactive in provision wherever possible to ensure it could respond quickly to changing need/priorities. The service also supports partners with their consultations, e.g. the Children's Commissioner's Office where two schools were consulted about their racism experiences and also supported the Youth Justice Service to produce a Young Person Friendly version of the Youth Justice Plan. A priority remains to reinvigorate the Youth Council.

The Inspire Pride group, established during the pandemic, continues to run and any young person working with Inspire from Flintshire can attend the group which has now transitioned to face to face delivery. A partnership between Integrated Youth Provision and Theatre Clwyd was established and a LGBTQ+ group was created after a consultation event with young people in April 2022. The group runs fortnightly on alternative Tuesdays to Inspire sessions so LGBTQ+ young people have access to a range of groups.

In addition to the core youth provision of clubs and detached work in communities, the service has also

embedded School and Community Immersion Youth Workers in five secondary schools including Welsh medium, which provide specialist youth service interventions in the areas of Mental Health, Sexual Health, Relationships, Child Sexual Exploitation and Modern Slavery. The support ranges from group sessions and 1 to 1 sessions, and also focuses on mental health and wellbeing, anger management, anti-bullying and respecting others, building confidence and self-esteem, relationships and stress and anxiety support and resilience along with lunch time drop-in sessions and signposting to other services. The team also provide community work, supporting young people in their school and community settings and any crossover issues are managed i.e. community cohesion, anti-social behaviour, bullying (often involving social media). This community work has also included drop-in sessions to facilitate parents voicing their opinions, issues and concerns to the youth work team and source advice. At one Flintshire high school, the School and Community Immersion Worker supports a project working in partnership with the Portfolio's Inclusion Team and school staff to work positively with students on improving behaviour and attendance, to improve engagement and pupil outcomes.

The IYP team continue to run a Transition Support resource for students in years 6, 7 and 8 students in response to evidence that these learners were struggling the most, having missed out on face-to-face transition activities for the move from primary to secondary education during the pandemic.

In the county's only Welsh medium high school, young people received support directly from the service through its Welsh Language Immersion Worker in response to students' feelings of isolation and poor mental health. These sessions encouraged students to express other concerns about sexuality and homophobia and the service responded proactively by commissioning other specialist organisations to provide information and other support mechanisms to young people with the support of the school.

A new monitoring, evaluation and learning tool was introduced in Spring 2023. This will allow for a greater level of performance monitoring and planning across the range of services offered. In addition to collecting attendance data, it will also monitor topics covered, levels of engagement, case studies, session notes and evaluations, and consultations with service users. The mapping system will also add to our existing insight to ensure that our services are targeted in areas of most need.

This level of activity clearly demonstrates the responsive and wide-ranging services provided to Flintshire's young people over the last twelve months and how interventions have been tailored to meet specific needs alongside universal provision.

Youth Justice Services & Flintshire Sorted

During 2022-2023 The Youth Justice Service (YJS) supported 147 children and young people, a reduction in 27 young people compared with the previous year. 80% of the interventions delivered were at a pre-court stage. Our cohort composition has remained relatively unchanged from the previous 12 months with 79% male and 21% female, with the most prominent age of children and young people entering the Youth Justice system between the ages of 14-17 years.

The Youth Justice Board continues to monitor disproportionality within the criminal justice system and based on their current disproportionality toolkit, Flintshire YJS's ethnic minority group composition represents 4% of our total cohort, which is marginally higher than the composition of the wider 10–17-year-old population in Flintshire. The service is being proactive in monitoring current trends and has developed a Disproportionality Action Plan to give greater focus to this issue.

The service is committed to promoting the voice of children and young people and in the last 12 months most children and young people open to the YJS have provided a positive assessment of the work of the service. As part of our assessment and planning process, the service also seeks a child's individual views on their aspirations and areas of their life. Based on self-reporting of 88 children and

young people, following YJS intervention, they reported positive gains in most areas of their lives.

All young people involved within the YJS undergo a comprehensive holistic assessment which assesses their likelihood of re-offending, risk of serious harm to others in addition to their safety and wellbeing needs. This also includes issues and concerns relating to education, training and employment, physical health and emotional and mental health. The services remains concerned about the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on our children and young people. A cohort analysis of 106 children and young people open to the YJS in the last 12 months has highlighted;

- YJS Assessments identified emotional and mental health needs in 67% of children and young people, an increase of 6% since 2021
- 24% had a physical health need, an increase of 6% in the last 12 months
- Whilst Alcohol consumption had decreased by 4% affecting 37% of children and young people, drug consumption increased by 14% in the last 12 months affecting 67% of children and young people,
- Additional Learning Needs were present in 74% of our cases, 33 % had a current or previous exclusion from school, whereas 48% had behavioural issues in school and 41% reported attendance issues.

In response, the service remains committed to strengthening our partnership with Public Health Wales and Wrexham Glyndwr University and are committed to becoming a trauma informed service. Additionally, we have increased our support available to parents and have commenced a review with health colleagues into YJS resourcing, pathways and training to support our cohort. We continue through our partnership with the Forensic Adolescent Treatment Service (FACTS) to embed trauma informed approaches through Enhanced Case Management and have continued to train staff to become trauma informed. The Service has also utilised Ministry of Justice funding for 'Turnaround' to provide additional resources to intervene with children and young people at earlier stages of the criminal justice system utilising a 'what matters' and trauma informed approach.

Whilst the YJS does not have a statutory obligation to provide Education, Training, and Employment (ETE), the service facilitates access to education through assessment and signposting/referral and will provide cohort information to Education colleagues to ensure a cross-portfolio approach. All children and young people entering the YJS are assessed by a dedicated Education Support Worker who will assess and highlight any attendance or additional support needs and will inform the relevant YJS and Education colleagues to ensure that appropriate support plans are in place. Attendance is also monitored at monthly YJS ETE Panels and information is shared with colleagues within Education, local colleges and Careers Wales in order to support and address attendance and access to education, training and employment.

The YJS is also a standing member on the Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) panel which provides opportunities for the service to raise the needs of children and young people open to them who are experiencing difficulties in school attendance and engagement. In April 2023 the Youth Justice Board also introduced new Key Performance Indicators that will request YJS assess the suitability and provide data on ALN provision for our children and young people. The Education and Youth Senior Management Team have been exploring mechanisms to provide oversight to children and young people who may not be accessing suitable education that meets their needs.

The three-year Youth Justice Plan is committed to the following priorities:

- Increasing school attendance and reducing exclusion and increasing oversight and understanding of barriers linked to attendance

- Increasing the range of ETE opportunities for children and young people
- Strengthening our engagement with Additional Learning Needs Services
- Developing opportunities for children and young people to develop their aspirations through skills and activities and alternative qualification networks.

YJS reports ETE performance to the Youth Justice Board and local performance frameworks on a quarterly basis. The YJB National Performance indicator only looks at those young people whose cases have closed in the reporting period, but from April 2023 reporting will extend to those open on Out of Court Disposals in addition to statutory Court Orders

The Service has also developed a Youth Violence Action Plan to address violent offending within its cohort. Whilst the number of assaults against the person have decreased over all in the last 12 months, Serious Violent offences (over a specific gravity rating) have seen a small increase. Despite these offences making up a minority of our total offences, the YJS sees this as a key priority for the next 12 months. The YJS remains part of the Police and Crime Commissioner's Serious Violence Duty Task and Finish Group and is closely aligning our Action Plan to wider regional priorities.

Within the last 12 months the YJS has seen an increase in the use of remand and custody. Between 2018-2021, 2 custodial outcomes were issued by the Court, however, since April 2021 the YJS has had 2 incidents of remand and 4 custodial sentences linked to 3 young people. We have assessed that a number of factors may have contributed to this increase including the seriousness of offending, non-engagement on community orders and difficulties within the wider social care sector to secure appropriate community based alternative placements to support children and young people. In response we have developed a reducing custody action plan which will closely align us to planned work around commissioning within the Social Care Sector and Social Services Department.

Flintshire Sorted (Young People's Drug and Alcohol Team) aims to prevent substance use and to minimise the impact of substance use on children and young people, families and the community. It provides a universal, targeted and specialist service to children and young people up to the age of 25 years.

Flintshire Sorted delivers a universal and targeted service within every secondary school in the County with the overall aim of diverting young people away from the use of drugs and alcohol. The targeted content aims to promote healthy choices, challenge attitudes to drugs, anti-social behaviour and other risky behaviours, and strengthen protective factors. Flintshire Sorted provide universal delivery via awareness raising of the risk of using substances through the PSE (Personal, Social, Education) curriculum in schools and via outreach delivery within the community. Flintshire Sorted offer a referral-based service for more intensive work with young people whose substance misuse is having a negative impact on their lives. A range of therapeutic interventions is offered to meet the individual needs of young people and help them to make changes and lead healthier lifestyles. The service also provides a consultation service for parents and professionals who may have questions about suspected substance use in their children.

Between April 2022 and March 2023:

- 694 sessions were held in 13 secondary schools and colleges
- 5226 young people were engaged in these sessions
- 59 Community Outreach sessions delivered engaging 1693 people

- Drug and Alcohol Community Support Sessions took place with trained staff attending identified hotspots for anti-social behaviour where substances were an issue. The staff offered support and advice to young people at risk of offending and provided targeted support session to individuals and groups. They were also able to direct young people to specialist services
- 253 young people received a targeted intervention
- 73% of young people reported that they had met their goals i.e. had gained more knowledge substances, understood the long-term effects of drugs, and/or had quit alcohol or smoking.
- 269 young people were referred to the service for specialist Tier 3 assessment and intervention.
- 118 professionals received training from Flintshire Sorted. These included: Social Workers, School Nurses, Residential Children Home staff, Safeguarding practitioners, Adult Substance Misuse Service practitioners.
- 81% of young people reported that they had met their goals i.e. had gained more knowledge of substances, understood the long-term effects of drugs, and/or had quit alcohol or smoking.

Healthy Schools & Healthy Pre-Schools

The Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes (WNHSS) is an example of a 'settings' based approach to health promotion. Settings based approaches are universal approaches seeking to influence the environment, policy and practice to enable better health and wellbeing of those in a setting. WNHSS was launched in September 1999, as a national framework. It is a network of 22 local healthy school schemes, with national and local responsibilities. The aim of the WNHSS is to support schools to become health promoting institutions in line with national healthy schools' criteria. Indicators for the WNHSS National Quality Award (NQA), were issued in 2010. The scheme was established in Flintshire in 2002 and works in partnership with local and national organisations to ensure a coordinated and multi-faceted approach to health within schools.

Public Health Wales (PHW) identified that the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes requires significant reform to optimise its potential in supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people in the future. Work started on reviewing the scheme in 2019 however this was delayed by the pandemic and work to complete recommendations identified in the review remained on hold until June 2021. The work was then recommenced by the national health improvement team. In Autumn 2022, PHW proposed a reform to the architecture of the programme to move away from 22 schemes towards a single all-Wales framework. Local delivery and ownership would continue but supported by a single benchmark and framework of what is considered effective practice, as part of a continuous improvement model. This reform would bring together both WNHSS and the Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing Framework (WSAEMWB) which are currently running as two separate workstreams with significant overlap. The timeframe for the proposed relaunch of the scheme is Spring 2024.

Despite the pause on the accreditation aspect of the scheme since the start of the pandemic, the Flintshire Healthy Schools team in 2022-2023 remained focused on supporting schools in addressing the following three local priorities for health and wellbeing:

1. Whole Schools Approach to Emotional Health and mental wellbeing (WSA)
2. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)
3. Food and Nutrition

Whole School Approach to Emotional Health and Mental Wellbeing: The Flintshire Healthy Schools

team have been supporting schools to complete the WSA self-assessment tool to provide a current baseline of wellbeing provision for pupils and staff in their school and action plan accordingly. In Flintshire, 82.1% of schools are currently engaged with this process; higher than the Wales average of 52%. 67% of schools have completed the self-assessment tool in Flintshire in comparison with the Wales average of 42.5%. These schools are now developing their action plans. Support will remain ongoing for all schools as they work through this process.

Relationships and Sexuality Education: The Flintshire Healthy Schools team have been supporting schools to meet the requirements of the RSE Code / Curriculum for Wales. Historically RSE has been a theme within the Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Schemes criteria addressed under the banner of 'personal development and relationships'. At a local level, officers supported most schools in the county to deliver a programme of sex and relationships education in line with the previous government guidance. They supported schools by commissioning experts in the field, sourcing training and resources, policy development and establishing platforms to share information.

For many schools, the introduction of the RSE Code has meant reviewing what they have delivered previously and refining the content to ensure it is developmentally appropriate; and enhancing this provision further to ensure all the mandatory content is met. A comprehensive programme of staff training for RSE has been fundamental to raise teachers' confidence with this area of the curriculum over the last two years.

RSE leads in Flintshire primary and secondary schools were invited to attend 3 workshops delivered online between Jan-April 2022 by an independent provider working across the GwE region. Staff from 49 primary schools attended the workshops. An additional briefing session summarising the previous workshops was delivered in September 2022 for schools that did not attend / or required additional staff training. Staff from 22 primary schools were in attendance. The secondary workshops were attended by RSE leads from 9 secondaries, 1 special school and 1 PRU. The small number of schools that have not accessed training have received access to these resources when support for RSE has been sought.

In 21/22 and 22/23, a pilot of an integrated scheme of learning for personal, social and health education was carried out, of which RSE is a key feature. This was funded through the Welsh Government's Wellbeing grant. 11 schools in year 1 and a further 16 schools in year 2 accessed the scheme and provided very positive feedback. Staff from 13 of the schools attended one of two RSE focused training sessions delivered. Workshops 'working towards an inclusive school' were held in January 2023 for RSE leads in primaries to explore how information is presented, values and beliefs around gender and identity and why these matter. Staff from 27 schools attended. Refresher training for the existing 'Tyfu i Fyny' / 'Growing Up' resources used by many primary schools was also delivered in Feb-March 2023 with attendance by staff from 29 schools. A face-to-face course was held in February 2023 to give guidelines to secondary RSE leads with the opportunity to practice skills and increase confidence.

As part of the RSE training, information about the period dignity grant has also been included and has supported teachers to be better informed about menstruation and be familiar with the sanitary products available. Training about reusable / disposable products has been delivered to equip staff with the tools and confidence to support learners in making the right choices for them. Courses were delivered Jan- March 2023 with attendance from 18 primary/ secondary schools.

All training is evaluated, and there has been a positive response by schools to the training programme offered this year. Feedback is utilised to make improvements to the training programme

as required. In most cases this relates to what further training schools would benefit from. For example, sexual health and LGBTQ+ have been identified as themes many schools identified as requiring further support and the team ensured these were featured within the programme of professional development offered. 4 secondary schools have also been funded to begin working on the Rainbow Award (delivered by the Proud Trust) and the Healthy Schools team coordinated the first Flintshire secondary schools 'Celebrating being me' event during pride month. 233 young people completed anonymous qualitative evaluations and the language used by 100% of the young people was positive. Examples of the comments made by young people that attended included:

"I have enjoyed the fun stalls and learning about different charities. This was important to me because I now understand that I finally fit in somewhere and I'm not alone".

"Today has been amazing and I have enjoyed it so much. I feel okay to be me when I'm here. Thank you".

"I appreciate the support and consideration for mental health. I feel seen and heard."

"Amazing event! It's lovely to see so many people alike come together and celebrate DIVERSITY".

The secondary PSE / Healthy Schools forum continues to meet on a regular basis attended by representatives from all secondary schools including Special and PRU. A follow up to the workshops held in spring term 2022 was undertaken at the December 22 meeting to identify how schools were progressing in planning their RSE programmes and this continues to be a regular agenda item at meetings. RSE training in 2023-2024 will be delivered through the cluster model.

Food and Nutrition: Work has been undertaken with secondary schools in reviewing the existing food provision in line with the Welsh Government regulations. In partnership with colleagues in NEWydd Catering, two learner events have taken place this year for consultation and engagement. Pupil voice has driven this area of work and the changes that have occurred. Several schools have since reintroduced their school nutrition action groups (SNAGS) following this focus. Examples of changes include clearer pricing on menus and reintroduction of sandwich 'deli' bars in some canteens. A new menu offer with input from learners is being launched in September 2023.

Vaping

Wales, in common with other parts of the United Kingdom and countries internationally is experiencing a rapid increase in reports of young people vaping. The School Health Research Network (SHRN) study showed a marked increase in vaping among young people between 2019/21 and 2021/22. Headteachers and parents, not only in Flintshire but across Wales and the UK, are raising concerns and experiencing significant challenges in managing behaviours around vaping. These include growing reports of addiction to nicotine which is disruptive to day-to-day life and learning. Concerns have been raised about the safety and quality of products and also about the growing presence of illegal products in the marketplace. In response, the Education and Youth Portfolio has developed a model Smoke free policy template. All schools have been provided with clear signage. Primary school headteachers and wellbeing leads in secondary schools have been offered training opportunities.

Co-ordination of Programmes

Healthy & Sustainable Pre-school Scheme (HSPSS): There are 45 settings participating in the scheme in Flintshire. Each setting must demonstrate that it is promoting health and well-being

through its policies, planning and ethos over 7 different health themes. At the end of each theme the setting is locally assessed and once they met the required criteria, they are accredited by PHW. In total 26 settings (58%) have now completed the scheme. During 22/23 there were 9 assessments undertaken: 4 of which were end of scheme assessments and 5 were health theme assessments. For 23/24 we will be actively recruiting more settings.

Food and Fun: The Healthy Schools team have coordinated the Food & Fun programme in Flintshire since it began in 2018. This includes the initial recruitment of schools, stakeholder group meetings, managing funding and direct support for schools prior to the programme beginning, throughout and afterwards. In 2022, over 280 children and young people aged 5-12 years benefited from Food and Fun in 9 schools in Flintshire, with over 2850 meals served during the 12-day summer holiday programme. All learners and parents are involved in evaluating the scheme. 13 schools (14 cohorts of 40 pupils) are hosting the programme in 2023, with the support of NEWydd catering, Aura Leisure and Libraries and the Dietetics team at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB).

Period Dignity: The Healthy Schools team has overseen the grant expenditure for this national project since it was first issued in 17/18. In 22/23 this continued with the online ordering and delivery of home packs in partnership with an external provider, alongside a wide range of community-based initiatives to make products available, including through food banks, community hubs, youth services and adult community learning providers. Reviews of the online ordering and home delivery service received from the online survey completed by 248 responders (parents and young people) found that overall, the service received a rating of 4.54 out of 5 (5 = very satisfied and 1 = very unsatisfied). Period pants were the most popular products ordered and 61% of responders were very likely to use reusable products in the future. The shipping time for products did fluctuate from between 3-8 weeks and some orders had not arrived at the time of the survey. The stock is imported, and this has led to some delays. 34% of responders did comment at the end of the survey with largely positive feedback about the service and some constructive feedback about sizing of period pants and delivery time.

“Great service for all young girls who are in need of these products and maybe cannot afford! discreet and great service”.

“Excellent project which allowed my daughter and I to revisit the conversation about periods, address her fears / feelings etc”.

Pupil Voice

The Council is committed to ensuring that the voices of children and young people are reflected in its work and actively seeks their engagement.

Following the introduction of the Framework on Embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Health and Wellbeing, schools are required to complete an assessment tool and develop an implementation plan based on the outcomes. This includes specific indicators where schools need to demonstrate how the whole school community is engaged and involved in day-to-day life of the school in influencing decision making and reviewing progress.

All secondary schools will again be supported to complete the bi-annual School Health Research Network (SHRN) survey in the autumn term of 2023, with data available in the spring term 2024. The School Health Research Network (SHRN) is a partnership between Welsh Government, Public Health Wales (PHW), Cancer Research UK and the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods. It is led by Cardiff University and brings together secondary schools across Wales and academic researchers, policymakers and practitioners from health, education, and social care. The

SHRN aims to improve young people's health and wellbeing in the school setting by providing robust health and wellbeing data for school, regional and national stakeholders. The availability of health behaviour data on both a county and school level are particularly valuable in terms of coordinating the delivery of services and interventions. Previously regular data on children and young people's health at a local level has been limited to the Child Measurement Programme, teenage conception data and the Sport Wales School Sport Survey.

The last SHRN survey was undertaken in 2021 with 7537 young people from Flintshire taking part which is an increase from previous surveys - 6585 in 2017 and 6773 in 2019. Findings from the 2021 survey demonstrated the impact the pandemic had on young people's mental health and wellbeing and all areas of life from screen time to sedentary behaviour. The data for emotions and behaviour in comparison with 2019 indicates at Key Stage 3 there has been an increase in emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, and peer relationships support. At Key Stage 4, data in comparison with 2019 also indicates an increase in emotional symptoms, hyperactivity, and peer relationships support. 43% of young people surveyed have screen time after 11.30pm on a school night, compared to 38% in Wales - a rise of 9% compared to county average of 34% in 2019. 21% of students surveyed spend 7 or more hours sitting down in their free time, compared to 18% in Wales. This is a rise of 4% compared to the county average of 17% in 2019. All secondary schools have action plans in place based on their individual school report and provided with support to identify their priorities. There is a county action plan and monitoring of SHRN county data on a biannual basis.

As part of the statutory processes in the identification of additional learning needs, children and young people are actively supported to contribute as appropriate to their age or stage of development. Youth Justice assessments and plans clearly reference the views and needs of the young person themselves and the Integrated Youth Provision regularly consults with its users and refines its services as a result. A Youth Council was in place prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and is in the process of being refreshed as part of the restructuring of Youth Service provision. It will resume its regular meetings with the Chief Executive, Leader of the Council and Chief Officer for Education & Youth in the Autumn term.

Any proposals for school organisation change include a children's and young person's version of key documentation and council staff facilitate consultations sessions with learners as part of the statutory process and report on their feedback in reports to decision makers.

Sport Wales has coordinated the School Sport Survey for learners in Years 3 to 11 for over twenty years. All schools which collect the required number of survey responses from their learners receive unweighted results in a school report and providing enough schools have participated, the local authority also qualifies for a report. The numbers of learners that have completed the survey has steadily increased from 5090 in 2015, 5208 in 2017, and 5212 responses in 2022. This year 3052 secondary aged learners from 8 secondary schools completed the survey alongside 2160 primary aged learners from 25 primary schools. Schools, supported by the Portfolio, will be expected to share their reports with their School Councils and use the information to secure further improvements in sports and physical activities within their schools.

School Place Planning & Provision including provision for Welsh medium & admissions processes

Flintshire County Council has a strong track record in strategically managing its school estate through both its own resources and through the effective use of grant funding schemes e.g. Sustainable Learning Communities Programme, to manage effective and efficient delivery of school places. It has demonstrated a willingness to take difficult decisions to modernise the school network to improve the quality of the learning environment to underpin teaching and learning and address issues related to

condition and suitability within its school estate.

Under its School Modernisation Strategy the Council has undertaken a major programme of school organisational change proposals which have included the closure of one nursery school, three primary schools, one secondary school, the development of four federal arrangements across the primary and secondary sector, the amalgamation of all infant and junior schools, the rationalisation of post-16 provision in the north of the County resulting in a partnership arrangement with Coleg Cambria, the extension of primary Welsh medium provision, the building of two new primary schools and an award winning 3-16 learning campus and other major remodelling projects. The Sustainable Learning Communities Band A Programme has now been fully completed (on time and within budget) bringing the total investment envelope to £64.2m for this phase of investment.

The Council's Strategic Outline Plan (SOP) for Band B is equally ambitious at £85m and has approval from Welsh Government and the Council's Cabinet. The Council is constantly evaluating its programme priorities and how to use the differing forms of funding available e.g. Capital and Revenue based funding under the Mutual Investment Model (MIM).

The proposed programme provides efficient and effective educational infrastructure to meet current and future demand. The programme has potential to remove up to 10 educational buildings from the service portfolio and ensure suitable investment in new facilities. All projects within the programme will be designed to promote, where applicable, early years' provision and community access to school and sports facilities.

The backlog maintenance for projects within the programme is £7,732,996 for secondary and £1,692,356 for primary. For new school projects, the Council would expect to achieve 100% reduction in backlog maintenance, for large remodelling projects an 80% reduction and smaller scale projects the aim would be for 50% as a benchmark. The Council has clearly defined arrangements for repairs and maintenance of schools and responds appropriately to emergencies.

The SOP is linked to the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. The Band B programme is focused on 3 of the 6 schools within the Welsh Medium (WM) sector, linking in with the Council's desire to ensure that WM is given priority and links into the National Welsh Language Strategy. Further funding opportunities have been identified and secured to build a new start up Welsh Medium Area Primary school to be located in an area of known Welsh medium demand and to serve nearby areas in the Northeast of the county. Other funding opportunities through the Welsh Government community facility and childcare capital grant are also being reviewed to provide capital investment enhancing Welsh medium learning provision.

Voluntary Aided schools are maintained jointly by the County Council and either the Church in Wales or the Roman Catholic Church. Aided schools also have access to separate capital funding streams directly through the Welsh Government. The Council continues to work successfully in partnership with the Diocesan Authorities to ensure that Aided schools are appropriately located and fit for purpose.

In September 2022 the Pupil Level Annual School Census showed the 64 primary schools had a total capacity of 14,123 full time places and had 11,747 total numbers on roll (NOR), which is a surplus of 16.82%. 11 Schools in the secondary sector had a total capacity of 10,718 with 9,716 NOR and 9.35% surplus places. When combined, these figures equate to 13.1% average surplus places across the school network, which is higher than the maximum national target of 10%.

Unfilled places in September 2022 were 3,378. This is an improvement on statistics produced in January 2013, when there were some 4,000 unfilled places in Flintshire schools distributed across primary and secondary schools. The proposals contained within the Strategic Outline Plan (SOP) for the Band B 21st Century schools investment programme, should they be implemented, will reduce unfilled places in schools to near the national target.

Pupil number projections methodology are aligned with other authorities across the region and are completed twice per year, these are linked to school data returns, namely, January PLASC and September PLASC returns. The capacity assessments are conducted using the Welsh Government's Measuring the Capacity of Schools in Wales methodology and are audited once per year.

The Council has an up-to-date Asset Management system and data from the system is used to influence decision making on capital investment in the school network. Priorities for investment for the schools' capital programme are clear, linked to the School Modernisation Strategy and are funded and based upon up-to-date information.

In 2016/17 suitability surveys were commissioned and conducted across the schools' portfolio based on national guidance. Despite the significant investment through 21st Century Schools programme and the Council's own capital programme, it is estimated that an investment more than £130m is still required to address suitability issues across the schools' network.

Table 14: Suitability of Primary and Secondary School Buildings

Suitability Grade	No of Schools	Percentage %
A	11	14.67%
B	24	32%
C	38	50.67%
D	2	2.66%

School condition surveys are re-assessed in line with national asset management guidance on a five-year cycle, with the repair & maintenance (R&M) backlog estimated in excess of £10.7m, a substantial improvement from the £35m backlog reported in the 2010 SOP.

Table 15: Condition of Primary and Secondary School Buildings

Condition Grade	No of Schools	Percentage %
A	5	6.67%
B	61	81.33%
C	9	12%
D	0	0.00%

Flintshire County Council has no schools in condition 'D' as this would mean that the school building life would have expired or be at risk of imminent failure.

The Council consults with children and young people, parents, school governors and staff and other relevant stakeholders prior to making proposals for any school modernisation change. The consultation process involves the completion and presentation of impact assessments around community, transport, buildings, equalities and language and includes a financial appraisal.

The responses from each formal consultation process are presented to the Council's Cabinet, along with the impact assessment, options appraisal and officer recommendations. Cabinet then decides on how to progress. For all construction projects the Head Teacher or nominated person from the school forms part of the "operational team".

Flintshire consults other admission authorities and coordinates admission arrangements with neighbouring authorities, including common dates of return and common offer dates. Flintshire participates in the regional North Wales Admissions Group to coordinate admissions arrangements and develop/deliver joint training. The Council is represented at the ADEW School Admissions Officers' Group and is aware of national and Welsh Government initiatives in the service.

The composite prospectus, "Guide to Education Services" is reviewed and published annually and is

made available online to all parents on 1st September each year, as part of the annual admissions round. Feedback from Welsh Government on the composite prospectus has been incorporated into the Guide.

Mos parental preferences continue to be met (96%). All appeals are held before the end of the academic year and any appeals outside the timetabled admissions process are held, where practicable, within 30 school days in accordance with the School Appeals Code. Panel members are trained in accordance with the Appeals Code, and advertising, recruitment and training of panel members takes place every 3 years jointly with other admission authorities. This is a cost-effective way of managing recruitment and training and ensures consistency across the region.

Applications for mid-term transfers are made online and every effort is made to process the application to admit pupils within 10 school days. Flintshire's Managed Moves Protocol is currently undergoing another review with Headteachers to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

Music Services for Schools

Music services for Flintshire schools are now delivered by Theatr Clwyd Music which was established in 2020 when Theatr Clwyd adopted the Flintshire Music Service to ensure this discretionary service was protected in the face of significant financial challenges for the Council. Flintshire pupils continue to have access to high quality individual, group and whole class music tuition. Learners have the opportunity to undertake music examinations and progress to county ensembles and national music groups. The Council works in partnership with the Theatr Clwyd Music Trust to maximise the impact of new national funding for music services provided by Welsh Government via the Welsh Local Government Association.

2. Quality of Education Services Areas Summary

Areas for ongoing improvement & sustainability

- Continue to support schools with the implementation of ALNET
- Increase access to education, employment and training for young people in the YJS
- Consolidate the outreach support and training for schools provided by Plas Derwen (PRU)
- Continue to strengthen links between the Portfolio and its secondary schools with the North Wales Economic Ambition Board to maximise learner access to apprenticeships and employment opportunities through the 14-19 strategy
- Continue to improve the school estate through the school modernisation and capital investment strategy
- Implement year 2 of the 5 year action plan from the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan
- Roll out the National Framework for embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional Health and Wellbeing
- Improve provision for children with Autism
- Refresh and embed the strategy for Youth Service provision
- Continue to work collectively across schools and council services to mitigate the impacts of poverty and reduce inequality.
- Share the early identification framework for youth homelessness and NEET through appropriate fora such as the Youth Engagement Progression Framework partnership, to ensure that all partners identify those at risk of poor or non-attendance, exclusion or homelessness in order to provide a coordinated and collective response.

INSPECTION AREA 3: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers

The Council benefits from strong leadership with an effective working relationship between professional officers and elected members, led by the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council. This is demonstrated through the portfolio structure within the Council where Cabinet Lead Members and Chief Officers work closely together to successfully achieve corporate priorities. This is exemplified in key documents such as the Council Plan and Well-Being Plan which are focused on improving outcomes for Flintshire communities and their residents, including children and young people.

Programme Boards are in place for each portfolio and are attended by the Chief Executive, Leader of the Council, designated Cabinet Members, Chief Officer and senior managers. The Education and Youth Programme Board provides a purposeful platform for developing the strategic direction of the portfolio, informs policy development and ensures performance oversight. A robust and transparent scrutiny process ensures that there is continuous challenge of performance and evaluation of impact. Cabinet reports, Overview & Scrutiny reports, performance monitoring reports and risk registers are jointly owned by members and officers.

The leadership structure and hierarchy of accountability within the Council, both from an elected member and an officer perspective, is clearly articulated and understood. Roles and responsibilities are clearly documented and there is a constructive working relationship between officers and members that delivers an appropriate level of challenge to the work of the portfolio to ensure the best outcomes for learners but also ensures that positive impacts and successes are celebrated.

Professional and political leadership is used effectively to manage the Council's core business of providing quality and responsive public services in the face of long-term austerity, the ongoing impacts of the Covid pandemic and challenging budget settlements year on year. This has been clearly demonstrated by the collective problem solving by senior officers and elected members in managing the Council's financial strategy and achieving legally balanced budgets whilst protecting and sustaining services. Financial planning processes are robust with high levels of scrutiny and assurance. Officer and elected members have a track record of working together constructively and with clear purpose on difficult issues. This has been reflected in decisions taken e.g. the management of the school estate and the additional financial support provided for services supporting pupils with Additional Learning Needs and deficit budgets in secondary schools.

The Council's approach to strategic leadership is underpinned by public service values. Within the context of delivery of services to children and young people there is a moral commitment to delivery in an inclusive, nurturing and worthwhile way which enables them to successfully embrace adult life and become responsible, independent, economically active and resilient citizens. This is clearly reflected in the structure and priorities of the Council Plan which reflect the Welsh Government's Ways of Working (Sustainable Development) Principles and the Well-being Goals of the Future Generations (Wales) Act and focus on six core areas:

- Poverty
- Affordable and Accessible Housing
- Green Society and Environment
- Economy
- Personal and Community Wellbeing
- Education and Skills

The Council has a good track record of communicating with residents, service users, its workforce and wider stakeholders through external and internal processes. There is a strong culture of engagement and inclusivity when agreeing priorities. An example of this is the Council's post-Covid recovery plan and Wellbeing Assessment and Action plan and in its work through the Public Service Board. What matters to communities is integral to priority setting and resource allocation. From an educational perspective this can be seen in its engagement work around the budget settlement for schools, in its consultations around school organisational change, in the School Health Research Network surveys and action plans and in other key areas e.g. youth service provision, play and childcare sufficiency.

The Council is proactive in making difficult decisions and where needed, the professional and political leadership intervene effectively to overcome obstacles. Systems leadership and the delegation of resources support the efforts to place the learner first and protect the quality of education and support services. This has been exemplified in the work by all officers and elected members to set legally balanced budgets in the face of significant financial challenge. Despite these financial challenges, delegation rates to schools to protect front line services are above the Welsh average and additional funding to protect schools' budgets are challenged in wherever possible. Over the previous two years, the Council made considerable progress in reducing the number of schools in a deficit position, a recommendation from the inspection of its education services in 2019, by targeting additional financial resources for secondary schools. However, with the current level of financial challenge facing the Council which resulted in a 3% cut to the funding earmarked for schools' delegated budgets for the financial year 2023-24, the impact is being seen in a reduction in the level of school balances and more schools at risk of being in deficit.

Across all education services commissioned by the Council over the value of £25k, social value is considered and included as a key priority. Social value is separately weighted during the procurement process, and supply chain partners are expected to monitor and report against the generation of localised social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being outcomes, in order to evidence value for money and social return on investment. A significant amount of social value is generated through education services including; the creation of local employment and training opportunities, retention of local people in employment, employee upskilling, growth of the local economy through a commitment to local spend, investment in local community needs projects, increased engagement with local schools through investment and volunteer time to assist in the delivery of the Curriculum for Wales, and waste reduction through implementing circular economy solutions to reduce, reuse and recycle waste. Two recent school capital projects at Ysgol Brynford and Ysgol Castell Alun achieved £968k in social value outcomes.

There is strong corporate and political support for Education and Youth Services across the Council. Political and officer leadership of Education is innovative and pragmatic. Education priorities are exemplified in corporate and portfolio level plans and are regularly scrutinised through the quarterly monitoring reports presented to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees. The annual performance report for the period 2022-23 showed 98% of actions on track and just over 80% of performance indicators met. The positive impact of this approach has been that the needs and priorities of pupils have been consistently supported both by officers and elected members.

Elected members effectively undertake their statutory duties and make a worthwhile contribution to the development and progress of statutory plans. They also show real commitment to safeguarding the welfare of vulnerable learners. Reports presented to the Education, Youth and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee are thoroughly reviewed by members and officers are appropriately challenged. Members are also positive in their acknowledgement of the work of officers and the impact of their services on children and young people. There is strong member engagement in the following areas relevant to children and young people:

- The Welsh in Education Forum
- The Corporate Parenting Forum
- The Corporate Safeguarding Panel
- The Schools Standards Quality Board
- The Youth Justice Executive Board
- The Education Consultative Committee
- SACRE
- School Budget Forum
- Regional School Improvement (GwE) Joint Committee

Senior leaders and managers communicate high expectations for securing improvement and challenge schools to good effect through a range of forums. For school improvement these include regular meetings with the head teacher community, working through nominated representatives on the primary and secondary Head Teacher Federations, School Performance Monitoring Group and other specific groups e.g. Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator Forum, County Curriculum Steering Group and Emotional Health and Well-Being Strategy Group, Digital Advisory Group and Welsh in Education Strategic Forum. There is also effective monitoring and challenge for other areas of provision through the Youth Justice Executive Board, Children's Services Forum and the Corporate Safeguarding Panel. The key objectives of the Public Service Board are clearly aligned with the Council's and Portfolio's strategic improvement plans.

The Council and its partners have a clear commitment to learners and to developing a learning culture in the county, from early years to adulthood. They understand the impact of national and regional priorities and how these impacts on decision making locally for services e.g. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, Education in Wales - Our National Mission, Cymraeg 2050 – Welsh Language Strategy and the North Wales Economic Growth Deal.

Whilst a lean team in terms of personnel, senior leaders in the Education Portfolio work in a collegiate way with a range of strategic partners across public services to set high level priorities together for the young people of Flintshire. They are well respected by elected members, external partners, regional colleagues and school leaders. There are effective performance management arrangements which bring about improvements. Managers ensure that objectives for individual officers link well to operational and strategic priorities.

The Council works effectively with GwE (Regional School Improvement Service). Since the inception of the service in 2013, there has been a good track record of engagement with the service to support its development and robust scrutiny of the service in holding it accountable for the scope of its delivery on behalf of Flintshire. GwE officers participate fully in Flintshire business and understand and contribute to the vision, aims and objectives of the Council. This is evidenced by the way in which GwE Business Plans support the Portfolio's Business Plan and the Council Plan. Roles and responsibilities of GwE officers in contributing to the delivery of the service within Flintshire are clearly articulated. This mutually supportive, yet challenging culture fostered between GwE and Flintshire officers, helps the Council maintain its focus on outcomes for learners across all phases. The Chief Officer for Education in Flintshire is currently the Lead Director on the GwE Management Board.

All schools have chosen to access the Human Resources, Employment Services and Occupational Health SLA provision which provides for a range of services to assist them in complying with their 'people related' statutory responsibilities and operational/ business obligations. Customer led solutions

manifest themselves in a wide range of service delivery including model policy and information provision, confidential telephone and face to face support, Heads Federation and cluster group briefings, conference sessions, case conferences and discrete advisory session. The take up rates, activity levels and repeat business support consistent 'buy back' levels and evidence that these services are valued and contribute significantly to school performance. Relationships between school leaders and central service providers are very good and the ethos is to support school leaders in their management functions.

Relationships between senior Council officers and trade union representatives are good and there is a high degree of engagement on key issues through the Education Consultative Committee and other statutory groups e.g. School Budget Forum. There is also a good level of informal interaction between the Portfolio's HR officers and local union representatives in individual school processes e.g. redundancy, absence management etc.

3.2 Self-Evaluation processes and improvement planning

The Council has a well-established process of evaluation, review and challenge. Leaders, managers and elected members have an accurate understanding of the Council's strengths and weaknesses. They routinely make good use of a range of rigorous monitoring activities.

The Education Portfolio undertakes a wide range of self-evaluation activities, first at a service level analysing any available data and first-hand evidence to make accurate evaluations of the quality and impact of individual services. The arrangements also identify clearly the areas for improvement and help ensure that progress against strategic plans are reviewed effectively and timely interventions made. This is then fed up into the Portfolio's overall evaluation of its annual Business Plan and into the Portfolio Annual Self Evaluation Report. This then links to the Council Plan which is regularly reviewed by Chief Officers and senior managers and reported on regularly to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees.

Through its joint working with GwE there are clearly defined plans for primary and secondary schools which are agreed between the Chief Education Officer and Senior Manager for School Improvement and GwE Core Lead Officers. Agreed priorities in the business plans are based firmly on the findings of self-evaluation processes within schools. The plans accurately identify key issues and include bespoke improvement plans to address the specific challenges, drawing on the resources of both GwE and the Council's own services. Plans are regularly updated to reflect the outcomes of whole school reviews and support visits commissioned by the Education Portfolio. Progress towards achieving the agreed outcomes are regularly reviewed by the Senior Manager for School Improvement and the GwE Core Leads. This then feeds into termly Quality Board meetings with the Cabinet Member for Education, Chair of Education, Youth and Culture Scrutiny Committee, the Chief Executive and the Chief Officer for Education and Youth. This ensures that strategic leaders are fully informed on school performance in Flintshire.

The Portfolio works swiftly and effectively with GwE Officers to address 'Schools Causing Concern' and 360° support plans are put in place. Where rapid progress in some schools has been required, Accelerated Improvement Boards (AIB) have been used successfully to oversee progress. When deployed, these Boards meet regularly and include key officers of the Portfolio, GwE and school leaders, including governors. Where required, the Chief Officer has used statutory powers of intervention and established Interim Executive Boards (IEB) to replace traditional governance models. This has been successful in improving the pace of improvement in identified schools. GwE senior officers support the IEB alongside senior LA managers. At the current time there are no schools in Flintshire which have either an Accelerated Improvement Board or an Interim Executive Board.

Where it is available, education officers use data effectively to ensure areas for improvement are identified quickly and addressed robustly through detailed business planning. As a result, the quality of information shared within Flintshire is of a high standard, enabling members to scrutinise and challenge progress effectively. With the Welsh Government decision to remove a range of data sets that were traditionally used for accountability purposes, officers of the Local Authority, Elected Members and GwE Officers continue to enhance ways to effectively monitor performance and measure progress.

Education officers within the Council focus well on joint planning and resourcing as well as building capacity for continuous improvement. The Portfolio has strong links with the community, has good liaison and communication with schools, engages positively with parents and carers and works effectively with other Council portfolios and external agencies enabling officers to deliver joined-up programmes that improve outcomes and wellbeing for learners. Good examples of this include the statutory processes around provision for children with Additional Learning Needs, the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Steering Group, the Adult Learning Partnership with Wrexham County Borough Council and provision through the Youth and Youth Justice Services.

The Portfolio engages well with partners, service users and other stakeholders in its evaluation processes and in planning for improvement. For example, the Youth Services Strategy “Multiplying Impact” featured robust engagement of young people’s representatives in its development. Any aspect of school organisational change includes consultation with the children and young people potentially impacted and school leaders are regularly consulted directly or through the Federations on major issues. The Council supports schools to make good use of surveys to improve provision and outcomes e.g. School Health Research Network and Sports Surveys and has engaged learners in evaluative activities in relation to school meal provision. Several young people from across Flintshire secondary schools were instrumental in developing and delivering the first ever ‘Celebrating being Me’ event alongside the Youth Service and Healthy Schools team in June this year.

The Council uses a corporate database for the recording of complaints, concerns and requests for services. A senior manager within the Portfolio is the link officer for complaints. Parental complaints about schools have to be re-directed back to the individual school to be dealt with via their own complaints’ procedures. Complainants are advised of the correct procedure and as necessary, the Portfolio provides support to schools on ensuring its procedures are in line with the national guidance. On-line complaints training is available to all governing bodies. During the period April 2022 to March 2023, there were 6 formal complaints against the Portfolio received via the Council’s Complaints process. These were in relation to school admissions, refusal of free school transport; statutory breach to ensure a school has a policy; SEN support and reference to drug use during a Community Justice project. No complaint was upheld. There were no complaints in relation to education services in Flintshire investigated by the Ombudsman in 2022-2023.

The Council is compliant with the requirement regarding partnership agreements with its schools.

3.3 Professional Learning

Relationships between the Education Portfolio and schools are strong and productive. Regular head teacher meetings and the partnership groups in the consultative structure form an effective mechanism for raising issues and agreeing actions to tackle them. Flintshire benefits from well-established learning networks within and across schools, and more widely across the region, enabling schools to develop and share their professional knowledge. Working in clusters and alliances has developed well in Flintshire over the last few years with all schools engaging in this co-operative learning approach. Key areas such as Additional Learning Needs, Digital Learning and Welsh Language have all benefitted

from a cluster training and support model.

Flintshire schools engage effectively with the range of professional development opportunities provided by GwE and the Council for school leaders, teachers and support staff at all levels. Flintshire staff have access to a comprehensive learning continuum provided by GwE which delivers appropriate training at all stages of professional development, from Newly Qualified Teacher to Executive Headteacher. Data shows that the take up of these opportunities from Flintshire schools is very positive. Staff within the Education Portfolio are able to access professional development opportunities within GwE where appropriate e.g. curriculum reform.

The Portfolio facilitates a professional network for deputy heads from across Flintshire primary schools. The network meets half termly and during the last academic year, seventeen primary colleagues from different schools shared good practice on aspects including positive behaviour management, assessment and curriculum planning. The senior Primary Learning Adviser brokers shadowing visits for deputies to other schools and signposts coaching opportunities to those seeking to further develop their leadership roles.

As part of the national Hub programme for digital learning, the Portfolio performs the intelligent client function for Ed Tech across all schools. This work is led by the Hwb Board, jointly chaired by the Chief Officer for Education and Youth and the Chief Officer for Governance. Annual meetings are held with all schools to ensure that they are meeting the requirements of the HWB programme and that sustainability of the IT infrastructure remains a key priority. The Portfolio brokers support for schools to develop provision in line with the digital competence framework and facilitates the sharing of effective practice through termly digital leader meetings. Bespoke professional development is provided for portfolio education colleagues on digital learning and recent technology. Flintshire has allocated funding during this academic year for schools and the English as an Additional Language Service to continue to support pupils who are digitally disadvantaged. This should enable up to 100 learners if required, to have additional resources to learn at home or within school to catch up and extend their learning and skills.

Partnership activities make a strong contribution to widening the range of choices for learners and this has benefits for their standards and wellbeing. The Council takes a leading role in developing joint working practices and promotes trust and good communication between partners. These include effective partnerships between the Council, North Wales Police, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, Youth Justice Board, Coleg Cambria, Wrexham Glyndwr University, Flintshire Local Voluntary Council and other local education authorities.

Partnership working between the Portfolio, further and higher education establishments, employers and secondary schools in developing the work of the 14-19 network is good. They successfully promote co-operation and enable school governors, Coleg Cambria, employers and the Council to plan, monitor and resource an effective 14-19 curriculum that meets the needs of learners.

The school improvement team works collaboratively to support schools in accessing appropriate services and educational activities. During the last academic year, ten schools provided adult community learning sessions and ten schools ran well-being sessions with a variety of mentors, introducing projects such as Foster Bear, working in partnership with social services.

One priority in the portfolio business plan has been to support schools to further improve provision for outdoor learning. Eighteen primary colleagues completed level 2 qualifications and six completed level 3. Thirty-five colleagues attended full day professional development courses on new curriculum projects based in the outdoors at Halkyn mountain and Talacre with a particular focus on Religion,

Values and Ethics (RVE). Following the implementation of the new Agreed Syllabus for RVE for primary schools in September 2022, the portfolio has also established a termly RVE network which has been well attended.

The Welsh Advisory Team in the Portfolio actively encourages school staff at all levels, including head teachers, to engage in the Welsh Government sabbatical training programmes for practitioners who wish to teach through the medium of Welsh or wish to improve their Welsh-language skills. This is a key component of the Council's Welsh in Education Plan which has been approved by Welsh Ministers. Take up across the different sabbatical options are good and Flintshire staff represent a sizeable proportion of each cohort. This is extending the number of employees with improved Welsh language skills, which is contributing to the improving quality of provision for learners in both English and Welsh medium schools. The manager of the Welsh Advisory Team is a key member of the Regional Welsh Language Board. During the COVID-19 pandemic the Welsh Advisory Team rapidly and successfully adapted their professional learning offer from face to face to digital delivery which was very welcomed by schools.

The professional learning offer supports current school leaders across Flintshire but also invests in developing leaders of the future. Subscription rates to the NPQH and Aspiring Heads courses from Flintshire staff are strong. Newly appointed headteachers are supported through development programmes and are also allocated mentors and leadership coaches.

Networking and peer-to-peer work is a positive feature in Flintshire schools. This collaborative work has led to a shared understanding of what constitutes good leadership. Collaborative practice amongst leaders is reinforced through strategic forums, at both headteacher and deputy level. These forums support strong effective communication and nurture a mutual sense of common responsibility for the development of responses and actions to local and national challenges.

The Council promotes professional learning for its core portfolio team through structured learning opportunities, most visible through the Flintshire Academi Infonet, which provides learning and e-learning modules on leadership and management, personal development, specific professional development, equality and diversity, Welsh language, health and safety and ICT. Education Portfolio staff also access training opportunities offered by GwE e.g. the development of the new curriculum.

The Council has a well-established and successful Trainee (Apprentice scheme). The Council recruit local people every year to undertake work-based qualifications. The outcome of the scheme over the last 5 years is very positive.

- **97%** of those who have undertaken an FCC Apprenticeship have had a positive outcome.
 - The percentage of those gaining employment within the Authority after completing the programme **79%**
 - The percentage of those gaining employment externally **12%**
 - The percentage of those moving on to Higher Education or other professional training programmes **6%**

The positive outcomes have remained excellent due to Chief Officer intervention to prioritise apprentices who could not gain employment due to the recruitment freeze during the pandemic. The Council also took the brave decision to recruit apprentices during 2021, no other large employers in the area did this, as pandemic restrictions remained in place within workplaces in Wales.

All staff benefit from the annual appraisal scheme which ensures personal and professional objectives are linked to the annual corporate service and portfolio plans. Centrally employed teaching staff have statutory performance management. The process enables employees and managers to explore individual strengths and identify wider opportunities for these to be utilised effectively. These opportunities support succession planning at a time where central services remain under pressure from financial and recruitment/retention challenges, particularly post-pandemic and also focus strongly on staff wellbeing.

As part of its People Strategy, the Council takes a proactive approach to talent spotting and succession planning. Senior managers regularly identify officers who have potential and signpost them to learning opportunities to develop their skills. Many officers within the Portfolio have accessed professional development e.g. Institute of Leadership & Management qualifications and NVQs through a partnership arrangement with Coleg Cambria. Senior managers are identified for external learning opportunities through Academi Wales and SOLACE (Chief Executives' professional association).

Senior managers network and share good practice through quarterly Flintshire Academi sessions which not only provide key updates but also are the driver for developing cross-cutting policies and strategies e.g. the Council's People Strategy and Carbon Reduction Strategy. Specifically within the Portfolio, there are termly workshops for service managers to share updates, future plans and engage in consultation and professional development opportunities. There is a comprehensive online training programme available for all staff of the Council to access on corporate training priorities e.g. safeguarding, GDPR, leadership and management etc. Networking by senior managers through representation on various groups of the Association of Directors of Education in Wales ensures service planning is informed by current and best practice from across Wales. The Chief Officer for Education in Flintshire was elected to the Chair of ADEW for a two year period from May 2023 and is providing strategic leadership at a national level.

However, in more recent times, and particularly since the pandemic, there have been increasing challenges in recruiting into key posts both in the Education Portfolio and in schools. Educational psychology, youth work, youth justice work and IT systems administration have all experienced difficulties recruiting appropriately qualified staff with adverts having to be go out multiple times and Head teachers are reporting challenges in recruiting skilled classroom support staff as well as key roles such as caretakers. In the secondary sector there are recruitment challenges in key subjects including Welsh, Mathematics and the science subjects. Recruitment in the Welsh medium sector is even more challenging. The recruitment difficulties in relation to school cooks, catering staff and cleaners has also had an adverse impact on the Council's key partner, NEWydd, which has sometimes made their service delivery to schools challenging at times.

3.4 Safeguarding

Safeguarding is a corporate priority set out in the annual Council Plan and the Council has robust arrangements in place across all areas. The Corporate Safeguarding Policy provides a framework for all council services to safeguard and protect children and adults, ensuring that all are fully aware of their responsibilities. This policy applies to Flintshire County Council employees, councillors, volunteers and organisations commissioned to provide services on behalf of the Council. Flintshire County Council is a member of the North Wales Safeguarding Children's Board (NWSCB) and North Wales Safeguarding Adults' Board (NWSAB).

The Corporate Safeguarding Panel is well established and includes representation from all portfolios, including Education and Youth, to ensure that all services integrate safeguarding awareness into the

way they work. This panel receives information regarding the working practices and procedures of every service in the Council, providing assurance that the services are meeting their duties in accordance with the Corporate Safeguarding Policy and Guidelines and reports to Cabinet on an annual basis.

The Chief Officer for Education and Youth ensures that all the statutory requirements in terms of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults receive due consideration and that effective safeguarding arrangements operate within the Education and Youth portfolio at the three levels of responsibility of strategic, support and operational.

In order to further sharpen the focus on safeguarding, the Education Portfolio has established its own Safeguarding Panel, and this is attended by senior managers within Education and with representation from Children's Services. It has clearly defined terms of reference, an action plan and ensures that communication up to, and down from, the Corporate Safeguarding Panel is effective.

The Senior Manager for School Improvement has the lead strategic responsibility for Safeguarding in the Portfolio and is the designated contact for officers and schools. The Learning Adviser for Health, Wellbeing and Safeguarding is the deputy designated contact who provides operational activity support, including attendance at national and regional safeguarding meetings. This officer also co-ordinates training for schools, governors and portfolio staff and provides model policies for schools. There is effective communication between Education and Youth and other portfolios in the Council as well as with external partners. An annual safeguarding report is presented to the joint Health and Social Care/Education, Youth and Culture Scrutiny Committee to provide members with the assurance that safeguarding functions are being appropriately delivered and having a positive impact on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

The Portfolio has appropriate arrangements for the strategic planning for safeguarding within both the core education service and schools, which includes monitoring. The safeguarding model policy for schools is updated regularly in line with revised national guidance (Keeping Learners Safe and the Wales Safeguarding Procedures). A structured training programme is in place which includes Level 3 training for new designated safeguarding persons (DSPs) and refresher training for existing DSPs, Level 2 safeguarding for managers and senior leaders including lead governor for safeguarding. Governor awareness training is also delivered termly. Materials and support are provided to DSPs to deliver regular basic awareness training to all school staff. Safeguarding basic awareness, and updates are also incorporated into local authority headteacher meetings and into planned LA training programmes for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and new and acting headteachers. In addition, key safeguarding themes are addressed on a rolling programme including Prevent and Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual violence (VAWDASV). There are strong relationships with key local partners including North Wales Police, Hafan Cymru and the NSPCC.

During the 22/23 academic year 371 staff accessed Levels 2 and 3 safeguarding training from 23 courses. The number of attendees on training has continued to increase year on year from 262 staff in 20/21 from 15 courses to 299 staff in 21/22 from 17 equivalent courses. When including training from governor awareness courses, digital resilience and harmful sexualised behaviour for 22/23 the total number of staff trained was 423 staff from 29 courses.

The level 2 and 3 courses (including refresher and full course for new safeguarding leads) continue to be delivered online. The number of participants per course is limited to 20 to ensure the quality of the delivery and maximise opportunities for engagement. This year, the training reintroduced the input from colleagues in social services, following a pause during the pandemic, which has been

incredibly valuable to ensure key messages and local context is very much part of our delivery content.

Feedback from headteachers confirm the training and support for schools is welcomed and effective. Evaluation forms are completed at the end of each training delivery and the information is reviewed on an individual basis in addition to any immediate response that can be implemented. Feedback is also included in the annual report to the North Wales Regional Safeguarding Children's Board.

Support materials and model lessons for teachers at secondary level are produced to support schools to raise awareness of National Safeguarding Week each year.

Excellent partnership working with Theatr Clwyd has resulted in a powerful drama workshop for Key Stage 3 pupils on the issue of consent, that has proved highly effective in enhancing pupils' knowledge and skills in keeping themselves safe and encouraged some young people to come forward to request individual support. This year, the Consent Project was delivered in 10 mainstream secondary schools, targeting year 9 learners.

The Portfolio and schools operate safe recruitment procedures and make sure that all appropriate checks are carried out. All schools are routinely reminded of their responsibilities under Section 28 of the Children Act and as outlined in the Welsh Government guidance - Keeping Learners Safe. There is regular monitoring activity through audit procedures. Schools have been provided with a model annual monitoring report for school leaders to use to report to their governing bodies and the LA on safeguarding matters.

The purpose of completing the safeguarding audit tool is to support all schools to review their safeguarding arrangements in line with the Welsh Government guidance **Keeping Learners Safe (2022)**. The audit tool is intended to help schools identify strengths and weaknesses in their safeguarding arrangements. As well as checking whether the school has robust safeguarding policies and practices in place, the tool asks headteachers/ designated safeguarding persons to make professional judgements on how effective and comprehensive they are by using the Red/Amber/Green (RAG) rating. Schools have a benchmark against which to work to continually develop and improve.

Flintshire schools were asked to complete the audit tool, in addition to the Safeguarding Children Annual Report in spring term 2022. The annual report is completed by schools for monitoring and includes review of DBS checks, staff training and policies. 74 from 78 schools returned a completed audit tool and all 78 completed the annual report. Data was reviewed and results shared with headteacher federations and individual schools were approached where further clarification or bespoke support was required. The Chief Officer wrote to all headteachers to highlight the common themes that were identified upon review of the audit tool/annual reports. Support has been prioritised accordingly; either on an individual school level or through a broader approach, including training or policy development or updates.

The audit tool will be requested for submission every two years with schools encouraged to update on an ongoing basis. The request for the Safeguarding Children Annual Report is scheduled to continue every 12 months. Submissions received are 27 from 78 at this point in the academic year, which is a decrease from previous years and in the main, as a consequence of the national action short of strike. The annual reports are currently under review and the findings will be shared in the autumn term.

Between April 2022 and June 2023, 15 primary schools, one Pupil Referral Unit and two secondary schools were inspected. All were judged to have safeguarding arrangements that meet requirements and provide no cause for concern. Three primary schools had health and safety issues relating to site security identified and the local authority provided advice and support to those schools in quickly responding to the issues raised.

The strategic lead for safeguarding and the learning adviser work effectively in partnership with managers from social services and the human resources team in the management of allegations against members of staff from schools. Online safety is an area regularly considered by the Education, Youth and Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The Council actively encourages all schools to use the 360° Safe Cymru Tool and the All Wales School Liaison Core Programme. The IT Service Level Agreement provides for web filtering in schools.

3.5 Use of resources

Flintshire's response to funding reductions in recent years has been measured and appropriate. The Council has adopted a systematic approach to ensure that efficiencies are secured across all services and the organisation has embraced alternative models of delivery where appropriate. There are plenty of examples of good practice and innovation within the Council.

Education reform and investment has remained a priority for the Council despite the challenging financial climate. The high strategic priority given to the education service is reflected in the Council's allocation of both revenue and capital resources. The schools' delegated budgets have been generally protected from efficiency reductions in recent years until the difficult decision taken this year to cut 3% from the earmarked uplift for schools, reducing it to 5.1% rather than the 8.1% originally planned. Risks related to the impact of poor funding on the quality of education services have been clearly set out and are understood by elected members and head teachers. The Council reviews the outcomes of its financial plans to make sure that funding is spent wisely and has a positive impact on standards.

The school funding formula is regularly reviewed in consultation with schools and reported to the School Budget Forum. Staffing, accommodation and financial resources are effectively managed and deployed to support learning and improvement. Partnership activity provides good value for money because it contributes to extensive opportunities and improved outcomes for learners in aspects which the Council and its schools alone could not provide.

The Council is committed to an ambitious school modernisation investment programme by maximising Welsh Government's Sustainable Learning Communities funding (previously 21st Century Schools) and its own capital funding. Flintshire is also a Pathfinder Council for the new Mutual Investment Model created by Welsh Government to deliver a new 3-16 learning campus in Mynydd Isa which will be the Council's first net zero carbon school in operation. The Council has also secured funding in recent times through Welsh Government's additional grant funding streams for Small and Rural Schools Infant Class Sizes, Welsh Medium, Childcare, Community Learning and Community Facilities and Additional Learning Needs. The Council has also maximised its investment programme through seeking additional external funding through Sports Wales to support schools to improve their facilities. The Council has a positive reputation for delivering quality projects on time and within budget.

The Council currently has an estimated Repair & Maintenance (R&M) of approximately £10.79m, which is a substantial improvement from the £35m backlog reported in the 2010 Strategic Outline Programme and has been achieved through targeted capital investment. However, the level of R&M remains a risk and is strategically linked to the Band B of the Sustainable Communities for Learning

Programme.

In response to a recommendation in its Estyn inspection of 2019, the Council had made significant progress in reducing the number of schools in deficit. It refreshed its policy for the management and monitoring of schools' deficits which is robustly applied. There are effective working relationships between senior council officers and school leaders to ensure an appropriate level of both challenge and support to control spending and reduce deficits in schools. With the level of inflationary pressures experienced over the last year and the 3% real terms cut to school budgets in this financial year, the number of schools declaring a deficit position is going to increase in the financial year 23-24. This worsening financial position is also reflected in a significant rise in the number of redundancies in teaching and support staff across the school network at the end of this academic year. Where balances are above the recommended levels, schools are required to submit spending plans to clearly demonstrate how resources are being invested appropriately for the benefit of current learners. An annual report on school balances is presented to the Council's Cabinet and Audit & Governance Committee for member scrutiny.

The Portfolio's services are heavily dependent on funding from Welsh Government through the Local Authority Education Grant and the Education Improvement Grant and any reduction/removal of these grants poses a risk. This is carefully monitored through the risk management processes within the portfolio and more widely across the Council. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence that grant funding is maximised to support strategic priorities and deliver quality services and drive positive change. Late notification from external funders for some services e.g. Youth Justice can make strategic planning difficult and create uncertainty within the workforce, impacting on recruitment and retention. In the best examples of targeted funding streams, early bespoke interventions with families make measurable contributions to improved educational outcomes.

There are detailed and rigorous financial management processes across the Council and regular reviews of portfolio budgets to ensure value for money and the identification of efficiencies. Cost pressures and other financial risks e.g. price volatility and inflation, are closely monitored. The Education and Youth Portfolio has delivered £3m of efficiencies through the business planning process over the last eight years. These efficiencies have been achieved whilst ensuring high quality services continue to meet need. Through regular portfolio budget management processes, senior managers take responsibility for their services budgets and are well supported by the corporate finance team. However, the Portfolio's budget has limited capacity for further efficiencies to support the Council's medium term financial strategy and is also facing a greater demand for services than ever before, particularly in relation to Additional Learning Needs and Education other than at School provision.

With a significant proportion of its budget used to commission the regional school improvement service, it is important that the Council is reassured that GwE has effective financial management processes in place. Communication and consultation about financial arrangements are effective with both core funding and grant-expenditure kept under regular review by GwE, the host local authority, the Joint Committee and all Chief Executives across the region. Detailed work has been undertaken to align grant allocations with priorities. Supporting Improvement Advisers to challenge schools on their use of grant funding to improve pupil outcomes remains a priority.

Overall, the Council's education services, including schools, continue to provide good value for money.

3. Leadership & Management Summary

Areas for ongoing improvement & sustainability

- Maintain rigorous budgetary monitoring and management processes to protect the sustainability of Council funding in challenging financial times to protect the delivery of quality education services.
- Maintain the effective monitoring and governance of the education service to drive continuous school improvement and deliver positive outcomes for learners.
- Continue to improve the school estate through the School Modernisation Strategy and the maximisation of Welsh Government funding streams.

