

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
13 JULY 2023

Minutes of the hybrid meeting of the Education, Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Thursday 13 July 2023.

PRESENT: Councillor Teresa Carberry (Chair)

Councillors: Bill Crease, Paul Cunningham, Gladys Healey, Dave Mackie, Ryan McKeown, Andrew Parkhurst, Carolyn Preece, David Richardson, Jason Shallcross and Arnold Woolley

CO-OPTES: Lisa Allen and Lynne Bartlett,

APOLOGIES: Wendy White

CONTRIBUTORS:

Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure,
Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
Senior Manager (School Improvement) (for minute numbers 13 and 14)
Learning Adviser – Health, Well-Being and Safeguarding (for minute number 14)
Senior Manager, Youth Justice and Flintshire Sorted (for minute number 15)
Managing Director (NEWydd) (for minute number 17)
The IT Infrastructure Services Manager (for minute number 18)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Officers

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None were received.

11. MINUTES

In response to a question from Councillor Andrew Parkhurst on the Regional Skills Partnership Board, the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) agreed to speak to the Facilitator to ensure that it was included in the Forward Work Programme.

The minutes of the meeting held on the 11 May 2023 were approved as moved and seconded by Councillor Dave Mackie and Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 May 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

12. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

In presenting the report, the Democratic Services Manager outlined the items scheduled for the forthcoming meetings which were attached at Appendix 1 to the report. There were no additional items to be included apart from the item identified by Councillor Andrew Parkhurst and he agreed to consult with the Facilitator to ensure that it was included. Information was then provided on the Member Workshops on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and Budget 2024-24 and Corporate Parenting.

The Democratic Services Manager then provided an update on the Action Tracking report at Appendix 2. The proposals for compulsory Corporate Parenting Training would need to wait until the results of the Penn Review consultation were known but the Democratic Services Manager confirmed that it was on the Forward Work Programme for the Constitution & Democratic Services Committee.

Councillor Gladys Healey referred to the online Corporate Parenting Training and felt that in person sessions for Members were better. The Democratic Services Manager confirmed that an online session had been arranged following the request for it to be held prior to the recess and at short notice. The session would provide a generalised view of Corporate Parenting and include the WLGA handbook and attachment outlining what the role entailed. The Council was currently reviewing its Corporate Parenting Strategy and it was proposed to deliver two further sessions, one in person and one remote, in the Autumn once the Strategy was revised and refreshed. The training would include specific themes for Flintshire, and it was also proposed to invite some of the Young People to speak to Members and answer questions.

Councillor Andrew Parkhurst thanked officers for providing the data for children who were looked after and excluded from school. The figure of 20% was much higher than other pupils and referred to national data which indicated that children who were looked after were more likely to be excluded for exhibiting the same type of troubling behaviour as their contemporaries. As Corporate Parents it was incumbent upon the Council to ensure that children who were looked after were not treated differently.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved by Councillor Carolyn Preece and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be noted;
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises; and
- (c) That the progress made in completing the outstanding actions be noted.

13. ESTYN INSPECTION OF ADULT COMMUNITY LEARNING (ACL) WITHIN THE NORTH EAST WALES ADULT COMMUNITY LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

The Senior Manager (School Improvement) explained that the update report followed the positive Estyn Inspection Report for the Adult Community Learning Partnership undertaken in May 2022. Members had requested that an update on the progress of the recommendations received following that Inspection with Estyn

recognising the Partnerships' areas of strength and development. The four recommendations and an overview of the work undertaken for each recommendation were outlined within the report.

The Senior Manager thanked Dawn Spence, the Adult Community Learning (ACL) and Post 16 Learning Adviser, who she said had been the driving force around implementing the recommendations alongside the work undertaken in the Quality Improvement Plan to enhance and develop the adult learning provision.

Councillor Carolyn Preece commended the team for the excellent progress which had been made and said that previously community education had not been promoted but the Plan enhanced this.

The Chair thanked the team for its partnership approach with the Council being very proactive in this area especially the commitment to promote the Welsh language. She was also pleased that the learners themselves were part of this

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved by Councillor Carolyn Preece and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress made against the Estyn Inspection was noted; and
- (b) That the Committee was assured by the rigour of improvement planning and evaluation within the Partnership.

14. HEALTHY SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

The Learning Adviser – Health, Well-Being and Safeguarding presented the update report for Healthy Schools which had been present in schools for over 20 years and was funded by Public Health Wales but led at a Local Authority level. The Healthy Pre-School Scheme followed a similar model with the Scheme providing best practice for the schools to work towards and an outline of the health topics were included within the report. Prior to Covid, schools were assessed on how evidence was collected to support development and information on what schools had achieved had been presented to the Committee. Since Covid the Scheme was under a national review which had coincided with the Curriculum reforms and a relaunch of the Scheme was proposed nationally in Spring 2024. The Healthy Schools Scheme was merging with the Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Well Being and would also be launched in Spring 2024.

The priority had been to support schools to address the whole school approach to evaluate their own provision for well-being in supporting learners and staff, to strengthen the positive areas, address any shortfalls and to develop an action plan for next year. The report included information on the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes (WNHSS) with 82.1% of Flintshire schools engaged with this process, which was higher than the Welsh average of 52%. More than 67% had completed the Self-Assessment Tool which had been well received especially in secondary schools. An update on the RSE Code / Curriculum for Wales and Food and Nutrition in secondary

schools was given. Consultation with learners across secondary schools had been undertaken with their recommendations for improvements included.

The report provided information on the Coordination of Programmes for the Healthy & Sustainable Pre-school Scheme (HSPSS), Food and Fun and Period Dignity. The report also included information on the Vaping Definition which was particularly challenging for Head Teachers in schools. Vaping was sold as an alternative to smoking for adults but there was no long-term evidence available at present on the implications of vaping. Information was provided on the formation of the Incident Response Group and the Authority was providing training for leads in Secondary Schools on the vaping devices, the different levels of chemicals contained within them and how to raise awareness of the risks involved. A smoke free policy had been developed and would be launched in the Autumn term and an outline on how the training would better inform Head Teachers of secondary and primary schools was provided.

Schools continued to receive support around the completion of the School Health Research Network Survey (SHRN) which would be undertaken in the Autumn in secondary schools to enable more local data to be collected. Once the accurate data from all secondary schools had been collected, it would be published in Spring 2024. Changes would then be required on a UK wide level to combat this and the briefing from Ash Wales would support that need for change.

Councillor Dave Mackie commented that he was aware of one school which had tightened their policy on vaping and had seen a dramatic reduction in the amount of vaping. Referring to the new Scheme commencing in 2024, Councillor Mackie suggested that a report outlining the plans and objectives should be presented to the Committee at a future meeting. He said that when updates were presented, it would enable Members to look at the report to understand the stages to see how the objectives were being met.

The Learning Adviser – Health, Well-Being and Safeguarding advised that the focus around the Plan was about the whole school approach, Relationships and Sexuality Education, Food and Nutrition, Food and Fun and Period Dignity. These priorities continued for this year and the objectives were provided at Section 1.06 of the report. Schools had their own plans based on their needs and an analysis which had been undertaken on the responses received to the Whole School Approach audit which would identify common themes across schools which could be shared.

In response to comments by Councillor Mackie around fitness, the Learning Advisor confirmed that Public Health Wales, as part of their Review, would be separating health themes with fitness activities standing alone. This would be prioritised more with Aura and other organisations who supported schools with regard to physical activity.

The Senior Manager, School Improvement advised that clear objectives and priorities would be shared with Members once the new scheme was in place. There were challenges because of Covid, the review of the National Scheme. The authority in the national discussions with Public Health on how the Scheme would develop. Discussions held with the stakeholders would enable those aims and objectives to be

put in place. She paid testament to the hard work of the Learning Adviser and the small team supporting this

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved by Councillor Dave Mackie and seconded by Councillor Carolyn Preece.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee confirms that it had received an appropriate level of assurance regarding the work of the Education & Youth Portfolio in supporting schools with meeting the current requirements of the Healthy Schools programme and in preparing for any changes as a result of the national review.

15. YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN

The Senior Manager, Youth Justice and Flintshire provided an overview of the statutory work undertaken by the Youth Justice Service in Flintshire. The Annual Youth Justice Plan was attached to the Plan which was required to be submitted to the Youth Justice Board annually. The Plan incorporated the shared Welsh Government (WG) and Youth Justice Board 'Child First' vision and Trauma Informed organisation with the support of partners in Public Health Wales and Glyndwr University. The service had previously been involved in a pilot in Wales using the Trauma Informed Model through the Enhanced Case Management pilot, and this was building on the success of the pilot and the positive results received. The service wanted to ensure that participation within the operational strategic objectives enabled the voices of the children and young people to be heard to inform the service direction, approaches and resources moving forward. These were included in the Participation Strategy which were agreed last year, and the report provided outcome information on the children and young people who came into the Criminal Justice System and the support they received from the dedicated team.

There were also changes in the type of offences which were committed last year with the Covid pandemic impacting the data which was able to be collected. There had been a reduction in public order offences, increases in theft offences but violence remained the number one offence and was given additional priority. This coincided with the statutory Service Violence Duty and Youth Action Plan around violence and work was ongoing with the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office to dovetail this within the Serious Violence Strategy. Serious violence referred to a small proportion of the cohort but remained a concern. Another concern for the service was the increased use of custody and remand, with the rates in Flintshire remaining quite low but there had been a slight increase within the last 12 months which related to more serious offences. As a service the use of custody was viewed as a last resort but unfortunately in some circumstances it had to be used as there were challenges around the social care sector for appropriate placements for children and young people. There was a need for a balance between supporting a young person and keeping the community safe.

The Senior Manager reported on the future plans for the service and the impacts on the cohort to ensure they all received a positive experience together with addressing issues of disproportionality within the wider Criminal Justice System.

In outlining the challenges for the year ahead, the report outlined the resource implications and the unique way the service received grant funding. This was provided by WG, the Ministry of Justice, Youth Justice Board and statutory partners such as Police, Probation Service, Health and other services. The Senior Manager explained how the efficiencies and the cost-of-living challenges encountered by the Council's partners had impacted the budget which the service received. Recruitment remained a challenge with people less likely to take short term funded positions. The measures put in place by the Management Board and Chief Officer Team had enabled a stable and supportive workforce. The service had also undertaken work on a Workforce Succession and Development Plan which would ensure that staff were supported, trained and undertook development opportunities. All Youth Justice Services in Wales had experienced changes in Governance, Oversight and Leadership together with the requirement to report on key performance indicators, which came into force in April 2023. Previously the service had requested a peer review around management and governance from the Youth Justice Sector Improvement Partnership. This supported the service by remaining strong to deliver the services to children and young people in advance of a HMRP inspection within the next 12 months.

In response to comments made by Councillor Dave Mackie around the funding for this service the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) outlined the frustrations around the funding situation and meant that the service was unable to plan strategically for a very vulnerable cohort of young people. Recruitment into that service was challenging which was why the Chief Executive and the Chief Officer Team had made the decision to appoint permanent posts on a risk basis for these specialist roles. The Chief Executive, as the Chair of the Management Board, had written to the Youth Justice Board stating how unacceptable it was at this point in the financial year that it was still now known what the core funding allocation was.

The Chair thanked the Senior Manager and his team for the detailed Plan and was glad that they embraced constructive reviews from colleagues which improved overall services within the constraints of the budget. She felt that they were at the top of their game.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved by Councillor Dave Mackie and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED

That the strategic and operational priorities in the Youth Justice Plan be noted.

16. COUNCIL PLAN 2022-23 YEAR-END PERFORMANCE

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) presented the report which provided a summary of the Council Plan priorities for year-end for the Education & Youth Portfolio. It was highlighted that 77% of activities were making good progress with 62% of the performance indicators having met or exceeded their targets for the year. Section 1.04 of the report provided a summary of the overall progress ratings against activities at year end.

The report provided details on the small percentage of Red activities, with the Chief Officer explaining that the Council reporting year did not align with the School Academic year and that the main focus in schools this year had been on the whole school approach to emotional well-being and baseline audits which were referred to earlier in the meeting. Schools were on track in completing their baseline audits and creating their action plans which would be reflected in the Q1 report. Referring to Section 1.08 of the report the Chief Officer provided detailed information on the sub priorities for fixed term exclusions and digital learning sessions provided in Welsh.

In response to Councillor Dave Mackie's comment on the lack of information from Open University Wales, the Chief Officer clarified that this information sat with Aura as it was one of their targets. She agreed to feed this back to them. The Chair asked that a request be made for a representative from Aura attend a future Committee meeting to provide background to their section of the report.

Responding to the question from Councillor Mackie on the Plas Derwen Pupil Referral Unit and increase in pupil exclusions, the Chief Officer said the portfolio had the support of the Inclusion Team but that part of the Strategy had been to use the expertise of the Pupil Referral Unit as these were highly skilled individuals who dealt with children with challenging behaviours. The Chief Officer provided an overview of the challenges faced around staffing and the focus to re-establish their senior leadership team and address the recommendations of the Estyn Inspection. In light of this the Secondary Head Teachers fully understood the situation and were sympathetic.

The Chief Officer advised that Plas Derwen was not the only source available to schools as there were opportunities for the ongoing development of their own staff in terms of behaviour management through the professional development and learning funding. Following the pandemic and the challenges that pupils were facing returning to school, many staff felt the strategies were in place prior to the pandemic were no longer successful. The whole school approach to emotional health and well-being was important as a supportive strand of the audits and plans that the schools were putting in place to support these issues.

In response to questions from Councillor Gladys Healey on Elective Home Education and the team supporting this, the Chief Officer confirmed that a report had been presented to Committee on Elective Home Education. The team comprised of a dedicated Officer who focused on this work with the support of a whole team of Educational Social Workers and Inclusion Social Workers. She reassured Members that the portfolio was fulfilling its statutory responsibilities in that oversight of children whose parents had taken the decision to home educate. There had been an increase with more parents taking that decision across the different year groups with some year groups more prevalent than others. Fixed Penalty Notices were issued when the school had exhausted all other opportunities for intervention to encourage parents to send their children to school. This was supported by the Community Focused Schools promoted and supported by Welsh Government (WG). It was around understanding the barriers and challenges that children faced in accessing their education and providing that support to families to assist them with these challenging issues.

The Chair referred to the letter sent to Jeremy Miles raising the concerns of the Committee which had been circulated to Members.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved by Councillor Carolyn Preece and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the Committee support the levels of progress and have confidence in the achievement of priorities as detailed within the Council Plan 2022/23;
- (b) That the Committee support overall performance against Council Plan 2022/23 performance indicators/measures; and
- (c) That the Committee was assured by explanations given for those areas of underperformance.

17. SCHOOL MEALS SERVICE

In presenting the report Mr Steve Jones, Managing Director of NEWydd Catering and Cleaning explained that the report centred around universal free school meals. Although this was a positive step by Welsh Government (WG), as a business it had highlighted certain risks as it made the company more of a target for private sector companies. Schools made these decisions themselves, so it was NEWydd's priority to provide a good service to retain the business.

The roll out of free school meals commenced in September 2022 with reception aged pupils and then with years 1 and 2 after Easter 2023. The service was on target to roll out to years 3 and 4 in September 2023 with years 5 and 6 eligible from April 2024. A significant amount of work had been undertaken in schools which included improvements to infrastructure, equipment, resources and ensuring processes were in place. A cross party project group was established to oversee this which included the Managing Director representing NEWydd and colleagues from across the Council to ensure targets were met. The Group also represented the Council nationally at meetings led by WG or the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to discuss finance and catering implementation.

Members were referred to section 2 of the report which included detail on the improvements to infrastructure with information provided on the central kitchen created 2 years ago and the work undertaken following the roll out with more school meals provided. All meals were fully compliant with the WG Healthy Eating in Schools Regulations with work underway to reintroduce, for example, more home cooked recipes and on-site baking similar to what was provided before the pandemic. Information on the pilot partnership with Well Fed was given with the results due shortly.

In relation to resources, it was confirmed that the revenue funding from WG was based on a meal unit rate of £2.90 per meal with many Councils including Flintshire reporting that this did not cover the cost of delivery. A Group had been established to review the actual cost of a school meal including all costs not just the food with the Managing Director representing the Council at a meeting on the 17 July. Referring to Capital Funding WG had awarded the authority £3m of capital funding which had enabled improvements to infrastructure, improvements to gas and electricity supplies into kitchens, ventilation works and the purchase of equipment. It had also enabled increased cooking capacity within the kitchens, and he thanked the schools for their support whilst this work was undertaken. There were a small number of schools waiting

for the infrastructure works to begin and a schedule of works was planned with the Council's property team during the summer term to ensure completion by September. An overview of the improved seating arrangements, lighting and crockery was given.

Referring to risks the Managing Director said it was important that families who were eligible for free school meals applied and he outlined how this was signposted across the council. Consultation continued with parents and schools with another survey taking place in September to ensure any issues at a school level were fed back. It was currently successful with uptake rates at 70% of those eligible aligning with WG targets but the service wanted to improve this figure to reach as many pupils as possible.

In response to a question from Councillor Dave Mackie on the energy efficiency of the new electric cookers, the Managing Director was not aware that they were more costly to use. Gas equipment was being replaced with Electric equipment as this helped with ventilation as the rules for gas equipment were more stringent. Some of the Capital funding had been used in schools to increase energy efficiency within the school.

In response to questions on menu choices and funding, the Managing Director advised that there was a large choice of meals but if the quality of the main offer was increased, the hot meat and vegetarian main hot offer choice going alongside this would be reduced. Currently the two main offers provided plus a jacket potato with various fillings, pasta pot with various fillings and sandwiches with various fillings. It was proposed to reduce this to meet or come within the funding envelope available which would reduce this to four items, the two main hot choices and pasta or jacket potato and sandwiches. He said that the most nutritious meal that a child could have every day was a school meal and if the hot offer was taken every day, then this was guaranteed to be the most nutritious.

From September all schools would be provided with fresh salad bars to support every meal with fresh fruit and yoghurt bars for dessert. This had been trialled recently in some schools and the children really enjoyed it, especially as they could serve themselves with many children trying foods they had not tried before.

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) acknowledged that younger children may not be as confident to try a different range of foods. The menus were published via social media accounts, so children and families were able to look at the choices. This was a fantastic opportunity funded through the Co-operation Agreement and the Managing Director was representing the Council on the group looking at finance and hopefully WG would be in a position to increase the funding per meal to accommodate the rising costs. The emphasis was on quality to ensure children had a really healthy meal and she asked that Members support the portfolio by encouraging families in their wards to apply for the free school meals.

In response to the comments made by Councillor Andrew Parkhurst around the quality of school meals, the Managing Director agreed that a sandwich would not be as nutritious as the hot offer. He agreed with the comments on processed cheese and white bread and said improving the sandwich offer was being considered. The menu was constantly being improved especially with the re-introduction of home baking in the kitchens.

In response to the comment made by Councillor Parkhurst concerning the seating at schools, the Managing Director said that this had been well received in schools who had been given a choice of various options. They were fixed with backless chairs, but the balance was that they folded into a small unit which could be moved out the way as the halls in schools were used for other activities within the school.

In response to the comment made by Councillor Parkhurst regarding waste and the use of single use plastics, the Managing Director said it was difficult to measure waste. He said waste was measured from the kitchens and production daily which was kept to a minimum. Once it had left the counter it was difficult to measure, and the service was criticised during Covid with regards to the use of disposables, but these had to be used because of the way the meals were served in classrooms. There had been a massive reduction in single use plastics with very few used in the catering service at present and once past October they would not be able to be used at all. Everyone was encouraged to take a plate, knife, and fork which was the most environmentally friendly way to serve a meal. Sandwiches were served in cardboard and all supplier's ensured waste was kept to at a minimum.

Councillor Carolyn Preece spoke as a school governor and said the chairs were an excellent use of space with the children and staff liking them as they were easy to fold up and move out of the way. Referring to nutrition she confirmed that she attended the Well-Fed sampling with the pupils who really enjoyed the samples they tried, and they looked very nutritious.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved by Councillor Carolyn Preece and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED

That the Committee acknowledges the work undertaken by NEWydd, officers and schools to deliver the Welsh Government's strategy for the provision of Universal Free School Meals.

18. SCHOOL IT

The IT Infrastructure Services Manager outlined the work undertaken by his team in Schools with regards to IT support and infrastructure. The Briefing Note contained information on the national infrastructure challenges and the Public Sector Broadband Aggregation Network (PSBA) which provided internet access to all schools and the Council. Background information on the Briefing Note in terms of how the services were delivered and recent infrastructure challenges were highlighted together with the mitigations undertaken.

Councillor Bill Crease thanked the Infrastructure Services Manager for the Briefing Note. He reported on a recent visit to a school where he was a school governor and the consistent issues faced by staff which was accessing the system using the WiFi service within the school. This was throughout the school, and he felt it was either the infrastructure within the school or that the set up of the devices accessing the service

needing checking. The Infrastructure Services Manager agreed to speak to Councillor Crease outside of the meeting to obtain more detail and speak to the school. All schools had received significant investment in IT infrastructure, wireless and end use devices with millions spent across Wales. He was more than happy to pick this up to establish why the school was affected in this way.

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) asked the IT Infrastructure Services Manager if the school should have escalated this through the schools IT Technician arrangements. The IT Infrastructure Services Manager confirmed that that was correct but he wanted to investigate it further. Councillor Crease thanked the Service Manager and said the amount of equipment in the school was fabulous with the main difficulty getting the device onto the system.

RESOLVED

That the update be noted.

19. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 p.m. and ended at 3.48 pm)

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Chair