

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
19 OCTOBER 2023

Minutes of the hybrid meeting of the Education, Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Thursday 19 October 2023.

PRESENT:

Councillors: Paul Cunningham, Gladys Healey, Dave Mackie, Gina Maddison, Ryan McKeown, Andrew Parkhurst, David Richardson, Jason Shallcross and Arnold Woolley

CO-OPTees: Lisa Allen, Lynne Bartlett and Wendy White

SUBSTITUTIONS:

Councillor Glyn Banks (for Councillor Bill Crease), Councillor Gillian Brockley (for Councillor Teresa Carberry) and Councillor Mel Buckley (for Councillor Carolyn Preece)

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor David Coggins Cogan (attended as an observer)

APOLOGIES:

Chief Officer (Education & Youth)

CONTRIBUTORS:

Councillor Ian Roberts (Leader of the Council); Councillor Mared Eastwood (Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure); Councillor Paul Johnson (Cabinet Member for Finance, Inclusion, Resilient Communities including Social Value and Procurement) and Chief Executive

For minute number 31

Strategic Finance Manager and Strategic Finance Manager (Education)

For minute number 32

Senior Manager (School Improvement) and Senior Manager (Business Support Services)

For minute number 33

Senior Manager (Flintshire Youth Services) and Lead Officer (Play Development)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officers

28. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR THE MEETING

The Facilitator informed the Committee that in the absence of the Chair and Vice Chair, a Chair would need to be appointed for the meeting.

Councillor Davie Mackie nominated Councillor Paul Cunningham and this was seconded by Councillor Mel Buckley. On being put to the vote, Councillor Cunningham was appointed Chair for the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Paul Cunningham be appointed as Chair for the meeting.

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Councillor Dave Mackie referred to Agenda Item 5 and sought clarification on whether he should declare an interest as he was a member of two Town and Community Councils. The Facilitator advised Members that that provided this information had been included on their Code of Conduct Form then they did not need to declare an interest during the meeting.

30. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

In presenting the report, the Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator outlined the items listed on the Forward Work Programme which was attached at Appendix 1. There were no proposed changes, but Members were referred to the additional items included for the 1 February 2024 meeting.

Referring to the Action Tracking report at Appendix 2 it was confirmed that a workshop was being arranged to look at the new menu which would be attended by the Chair and Vice Chair, with feedback provided to the Committee. With regard to the Self-Evaluation Report Education Services 2022-23 it was confirmed that Jennie Williams would be preparing a Briefing Note on the school condition grades which would be circulated to the Committee.

Councillor Dave Mackie referred to the training data appendix from the GwE Annual Report, which had been circulated to the Committee following the last meeting. He explained that the information that he had requested had been as follows:-

- What training was being offered to teachers in Flintshire;
- What training was being devised;
- What was the purpose of the training;
- How many people were expected to attend the training.

Councillor Mackie asked if the training data document could be refined to include the above information explaining that he would be happy to meet with officers to discuss this. The Facilitator agreed to pick this up with officers following the meeting.

Councillor Mackie also referred to Out of County Placements and reflected on a workshop held a number of years ago which had been helpful. He asked if this could be included on the FWP for Members to gain a better understand of what was involved and also maybe assist with possible solutions to the budget pressure. He also

suggested that a workshop be provided to Members on Out of County Placements following every County Council election.

The Facilitator advised that Out of County Placements fell under the terms of reference of the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee. She agreed to pass on the request following the meeting and ask that the Committee be invited to any consideration on this matter. With regard to the request for a workshop she agreed to speak to the Democratic Services Manager to ask that it was included on the forward planning for future workshops for Members.

Councillor Gladys Healey spoke in support of the comments made by Councillor Mackie around Out of County Placement and referred to a proposal within her ward which would support young people and assist with reducing the budget overspend. She asked if an update could be provided on this. The Facilitator agreed to speak to officers in Social Services with regard to Councillor Healey's request for information.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved by Councillor Arnold Woolley and seconded by Councillor Dave Mackie.

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.

31. BUDGET 2024/25 – STAGE 2

The Strategic Finance Manager introduced the report the purpose of which was to review and comment on the budget pressures and cost reductions under the remit of the Committee.

The Strategic Finance Manager and Strategic Finance Manager (Education) provided a presentation on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Budget Setting 2024/25 which covered the following points for the Education & Youth Portfolio:

- Purpose and Background
- The additional budget requirement for the Council
- Additional Budget Requirement – Ongoing Risks
- Overall Position after initial solutions
- Summary and Conclusions
- Summary Education and Youth Cost Pressures
- Education & Youth Budget Reductions
- The 2024/25 Budget Challenge – our approach
- Education and Youth Budget Reductions (1)
- Education and Youth Budget Reductions (2)
- Summary Education and Youth Budget Reductions

- Education and Youth Budget Reductions (3)
- School Cost Pressures
- Summary Schools Cost Pressures
- School Budget Reductions
- Education and Youth Portfolio and Schools Ongoing Risk
- Out of County
- Next Steps for the Budget Setting Process 2024/25
- Budget Process – Stage 2
- Budget Process – Stage 3 (Final)

Councillor Dave Mackie in referring to the presentation, recommended that the following items be included on the Committee's Forward Work Programme, which was seconded by Councillor Jason Shallcross:-

- Recruitment and Retention – A report on issues around recruitment and retention within the Education & Youth Portfolio; and
- Demographics – A report on demographics and how this would impact future budgets.

In response to a question on safeguarding by Councillor Mackie, the Senior Manager (School Improvement) commented that since the pandemic the level of complex cases in schools had increased. It was explained that schools had significant responsibilities when it came to Safeguarding and Child Protection with the portfolio providing additional support to schools with up-to-date advice and guidance. Safeguarding was complex and continually changing especially with regard to online safety. It was explained that because Safeguarding was prioritised that this placed increased pressure on the team and their capacity to support schools.

In response to the suggestion made by Councillor Mackie for the additional items around recruitment and retention and demographics, the Strategic Finance Manager (Education) advised that the issues around recruitment and retention was a wider issue affecting all portfolio's, therefore consideration would need to be given on how this could be taken forward. She also explained that there was evidence of changes in demographics and that these should be expected in the future. It was highlighted that the demography in the specialist provision was increasing in numbers and complexity. There were reductions in the numbers of pupils in primary schools and she explained how this year a larger year 6 group of pupils had been transitioning to secondary schools with smaller nursery and reception classes. This unfortunately would impact schools as the regulations required that 70% of school funding was based around pupil numbers, with funding following the pupils. It was difficult to predict forecasts around demography and any reductions in school budgets should also consider the demographic reductions in schools.

Responding to Councillor Andrew Parkhurst's question on staff increases, the Strategic Finance Manager confirmed that this would equate to an increase in staff in the School Improvement Team, which would be a recruitment of an additional part time post. There would also be an increase in the team of Health & Safety Monitoring Officers.

In response to Councillor Parkhurst's question on the changes in staff terms and conditions in Youth Services, the Senior Manager (Flintshire Youth Services) provided an overview of the work which was being undertaken with regard to maximising assets. Referring to the staffing element he clarified that staff had previously been paid against a JNC pay scale and it was proposed to move all staff across to the NJC pay scale. This would ensure that the service ran as efficiently as possible together with increasing the provision and presence on the street.

Councillor Andrew Parkhurst referred to the increase in demand and complexity of Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) and asked whether the reduction in the need for external placements could reduce the cost estimated for 2025/26. The Strategic Finance Manager explained that the budget pressure shown for 2025/26 was a gross position of increasing costs of staff and resources needed at Plas Derwen. She said that she would speak to Senior Manager Inclusion Services following the meeting around what information on estimates could be provided to the Committee.

Councillor Parkhurst also referred to recommendation 5 shown in the report and said that he had difficulty in providing areas of possible cost efficiency as Members had not been provided with a breakdown of the Education and Youth portfolio budget line by line. The Strategic Finance Manager referred to information provided to Members last year which provided a breakdown of portfolio budgets and said this could be circulated to the Committee if it felt it would be useful. Councillor Parkhurst welcomed the additional information being circulated following the meeting.

Councillor Glyn Banks referred to the Out of County figure of £500,000 included in the forecast and asked if this should be shown as a £1m projected overspend. In response the Strategic Finance Manager said it was showing as an £1m in year overspend currently in the Monitoring Report recently presented to Cabinet. There was some anticipated demand included in this figure as a contingency which would be monitored throughout the year with placements moving in and out of the service. This required constant review and it may need to be increased as things progressed throughout the year.

Councillor Arnold Woolley referred to demography and the reduction in the numbers coming into schools and asked if this was linked to the increased number of children who were now home schooled. In response, the Strategic Finance Manager did not think that this was related. The numbers were falling in primary schools but there was not an equivalent increase in the home-schooling figures. The Senior Manager (School Improvement) commented that this forecast related to a fall in birth rates which had been monitored for a number of years and was difficult to predict. She explained how the funding for key stage 4 and key stage 3 pupils was allocated.

The Leader of the Council advised that the Education & Youth Portfolio had been forecasting the expected decline in primary school numbers for a number of years. He referred to the pressures a few years ago when a large year 7 group was moving through schools. He did not feel that this was the same and even though there was quite a decline in the primary year groups that this was due to the natural population cycles. He understood how difficult this was for schools and governing bodies with the difficult decisions that had to be made. He reminded Members that the Education budget was the largest budget within the Council, with the schools delegated budgets

amounting to 80/90% which was delegated to financial decisions made by schools and governing bodies in Flintshire. He agreed that it was important that there was scrutiny of the remainder of the budget left within the Education Department. If parts of the Council's budget were ringfenced at this early stage it had implications on the cost reductions for other department such as Social Services or Streetscene.

Councillor Dave Mackie referred to the comments made by the Leader. He referred to the 3% cut to every school in their budgets last year and had spoken with finance officers about how this had been implemented. He understood that this would carry on every year as it was in the base budget. It was possible for a small number of schools to take the money out of their balances, but this did not apply to all schools, and he was aware of some schools which had insufficient balances in order to fund that cut in the budget. He said that this was a specific cut in the budget for every school whether there was a positive balance in funding or not.

The Leader responded to clarify that the way it was administered was through the Schools Delegated Budgets but the intention of it was that it was a hit on school balances. He appreciated not every school had balances and when the balances report was produced some schools managed their balances well with other schools having pressures that they had to deal with. The Council had to produce a balanced budget and unless additional resources were forthcoming then Council Tax increase was the only other place to raise funds. He referred to the Council's decision to keep Council Tax at 5% last year when inflation was at 10% and costs were increasing. This was a very concerning situation for everyone and the Council wished to provide the best services for Flintshire.

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

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Education and Youth portfolio's cost pressures be noted;
- (b) That the Schools' budget cost pressures be noted;
- (c) That the Education and Youth portfolio's options to reduce budgets be noted;
- (d) That the options to reduce the delegated schools' budget be noted;
- (e) That a report on issues around recruitment and retention be included on the Committee's Forward Work Programme; and
- (f) That a report on Demographics and how this would impact future budgets be included on the Committee's Forward Work Programme.

32. FLINTSHIRE COUNTY SUMMER PLAYScheme 2023

The Senior Manager (Flintshire Youth Services) introduced a report to provide feedback on the Flintshire County Summer Playscheme 2023.

The Lead Officer (Play Development) provided a detailed update on the Summer Playscheme 2023, reporting that Flintshire offered a total of 56 safe site locations for playschemes, with the duration of these schemes spanning 3, 4, 5, or 6 weeks, depending on the specific requirements of the Town and Community Councils. In total 3,681 children registered county-wide for Playschemes, resulting in a total daily registration count of 11,907. 1,200 play sessions were delivered, or 8,000 hours of contact time. 69 staff were employed on short term contracts for the Summer where they received 5 days of training prior to delivery. In continuation with the commitment to fighting holiday hunger, 5,000 bottles of water and 3,000 snacks bars were provided.

This year's Summer Playschemes introduced Welsh language into play activities across all sites which aligned with Flintshire County Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. Additionally, at least one Welsh-speaking staff member was present at 10 sites which enabled a more extensive provision for Welsh-speaking children. Also, during the summer of 2023, 32 children and young individuals enrolled in the Buddy Scheme, granting them access to their local community Playscheme. The Buddy Scheme supported inclusivity, accessibility, and engagement for all children, regardless of their abilities. The funding for the Buddy Scheme was secured through the Families First grant.

The Lead Officer (Play Development) reported that the Playschemes were supported by 30 Town and Community Councils with a variety of schemes provided. As part of recommendation 3, outlined within the report, it was proposed to change this to either a 3- or 6-week scheme. This would assist with the management and staffing of the sites, and it was explained how having two 3 weekly sites could benefit a community. Currently it was difficult to grow the service and he referred to the recommendation that Town and Community Councils consider the possibility to commit in principle to a 3-year funding cycle which would enable long term objectives and provision in communities to be considered.

The Lead Officer (Play Development) also reported that the Flintshire Play Development was planning an innovative and sustainable future to the delivery and commitment to children in Flintshire. Using the successful summer holiday provision as a blueprint, the aim was to provide holiday provisions during all school holidays. The benefits of this commitment were outlined within the report.

Councillor Ryan McKeown asked how many children who attended the summer playschemes in 2023 received free school meals, how this compared to previous years and was there comparable data on children receiving school meals across Flintshire. He referred to the 25 schemes which ran 4- or 5-week schemes across the summer of 2023 and asked whether officers envisaged these schemes increasing to 6 weeks or reducing to 3, as proposed in recommendation 3. He also asked when contact would be made with Town and Community Council's around proposed changes for the Summer Playscheme 2024.

The Lead Officer (Play Development) clarified that the service did not hold information on children attending the scheme who were eligible for free school meals but information they did hold could be shared with the relevant officers for an analysis to be made. With regard to the 25 lead sites, he said the increase to a 6-week provision

would not have a significant financial impact. He also confirmed that letters to Town and Community Councils were currently being drafted.

Councillor McKeown clarified that the information on the number of children eligible for free school meals attending the playscheme would be helpful and he felt this could be considered as part of the work of the School Meal Working Group. The Senior Manager (Flintshire Youth Services) said that this was something that they would support and that the service had been involved with the delivery of the fun food and fitness and tackling holiday hunger programmes. He outlined the complexities in delivering food to sites which were run for a small number of hours a day, but he said the service would support involvement from a play and youth prospective.

Councillor Dave Mackie referred to the Leeswood Transition Club, details of which had been provided at Appendix 6 of the report and suggested that the Committee receive a fuller report on the success of the scheme at a future meeting. The Lead Officer (Play Development) confirmed that he would be happy to provide a further report to the Committee.

Councillor Mackie asked if consideration was given to the different populations within each of the Town and Community Councils, with the smallest having 278 properties and half of the Town and Community Council's holding budgets of less than £50,000 per year. He felt that it could be difficult for some to provide additional funding to move towards an increased 6-week scheme and an all-year school holiday scheme. In response, the Lead Officer (Play Development) understood the financial challenges faced and said that work was being undertaken collectively to assess whether additional funding streams were available. He clarified that those Town and Community Councils who funded 4 weeks schemes could drop to 3 weeks providing a financial saving but if a Town or Community Council was funding two 4-week sites then these could continue as a 6-week one with the community benefitting from a whole summer provision rather than a shorter scheme at the beginning of the summer holidays.

Councillor Andrew Parkhurst raised concern around the glitches with the IT system which had not allowed parents to enrol their children a few days before the schemes were due to start and that the advertising literature hadn't been available until a few days before which meant that some parents were unaware the provision was running. In response, the Lead Officer (Play Development) confirmed that they had been made aware of the IT glitches and that they had been resolved in a timely manner. He agreed that advertising literature had been late and confirmed that work was being undertaken now in readiness for the promotional campaign next year to ensure that this did not happen again.

Councillor Glyn Banks referred to the 5,000 bottles of water provided and suggested that re-usable bottles be provided on the first day of the scheme which children could re-fill themselves and bring with them to the remaining days of the scheme. He said that this would assist with the reduction in use of plastic and also provide a financial benefit which could be used for prizes/certificates to children in promoting recycling. The Lead Officer (Play Development) supported this suggestion from Councillor Banks.

Councillor Banks also provided information on the two schemes supported within his ward which covered a high number of villages. He referred to the proposal for Town and Community Councils to commit to a three-year funding cycle and asked if certainty could be provided that there would be no financial increase during the three-year period. In response, the Lead Officer (Play Development) reported that discussions would be held with Town and Community Councils, and he reported on the work being undertaken with regard to next year's sites. Referring to the three-year funding he said the predicted costs would be provided with the intention of not shifting from this unless there was a significant change. For those Town or Community Councils who provided their own schemes he fully supported this and reported that training was offered to their staff at no cost to ensure that all play provision in Flintshire was being carried out in the same way.

Councillor Banks sought clarification on recommendation 1, as outlined in the report and the Leader of the Council confirmed that the Committee was being asked to support the proposal to speak to Town and Community Councils on a three-year funding cycle. The Facilitator suggested that, following the comments from Councillor Banks, recommendation 1 be amended to "that the Committee support Youth Services in liaising with Town and Community Councils around a three-year in principle funding cycle for community play provision.;

The Chair thanked officers for the report and was pleased to see the information on the number of sites provided, children participating and that the buddy scheme was still in operation. He was also pleased to see that this was supported by the 3 Ukrainian and 10 Welsh speaking team members and that the Welsh language was being promoted.

The first recommendation, as amended, and remaining recommendations, as outlined in the report, were moved by Councillor Glyn Banks and seconded by Councillor Dave Mackie.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee support Youth Services in liaising with Town and Community Councils around a three-year in principle funding cycle for community play provision;
- (b) That the Committee endorse Youth Services to work with a range of partners, such as Adult Community Learning to offer an extensive training package for all Play Development team members to ensure quality Play Work delivery was of the highest standard;
- (c) That the Committee endorse Youth Services to liaise with Town and Community Councils to opt for either three or six-week sites only, to allow for ease of recruitment, planning, business continuity and efficient use of resources;
- (d) That the Committee endorse the 'Transition Programme' by Flintshire Play Development and Youth Services, in order to effectively prepare children for the next stage of their lives through play-based coping strategies, which had been shown successful in the past academic year; and

- (e) That the Committee commit to supporting the Play Sufficiency Action Plan through advocacy, attending meetings, and attending local events which would help develop the PSA Action Group, champion inclusivity, attract additional external funding, increase community engagement and help create stronger networks which would have a positive impact on children's health and wellbeing.

33. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.04 pm)

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Chair