

LIFELONG LEARNING
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9 JUNE, 2011

Minutes of the meeting of the Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Tuesday, 9 June, 2011

PRESENT: Councillor R.P. MacFarlane (Chairman)

Councillors: R. Dolphin, E.F. Evans, H.T. Howorth, C. Legg, D.L. Mackie, D.I. Mackie, I.B. Roberts, W.O. Thomas and C.A. Thomas

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Mr. D. Hytch, Mrs. R. Stark and Mrs. R. Price

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors J.E. Falshaw for F. Gillmore, A.P. Shotton for R.C. Bithell, Q.R.H. Dodd for H.J. McGuill and J.C. Cattermoul for T. Newhouse

APOLOGIES: Councillor H.T. Isherwood, Ms. C. Burgess, Mrs. R. Stark and Mrs. T. Millington

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors J.B. Attridge, P.J. Curtis, V. Gay, P.G. Heesom, C.M. Jones, A. Minshull and D.E. Wisinger

CONTRIBUTORS: Executive Member for Education, Director of Lifelong Learning, Head of Schools Services, Head of Development and Resources, Head of Culture and Leisure, and Secondary Phase Officer

IN ATTENDANCE: Democracy and Governance Manager, Learning and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (including Whipping Declarations)

The Chairman advised Members of the need to declare a personal interest in school related items on the agenda if they were school or college governors. All Members present except Councillors E.F. Evans, J.C. Cattermoul and Mrs. R. Stark declared an interest as school governors in secondary schools.

2. MINUTES

- (i) The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8 March, 2011 were submitted.

Accuracy

Page 7, (paragraph 1, line 1) the word "had" to be removed.

Matters arising

Mr. D. Hytch asked if information on Cyberbullying had been circulated. The Learning and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator explained that the information had been circulated on 16th March and offered to re-circulate it to Mr. Hytch.

- (ii) The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 April, 2011 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

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

3. SCHOOL MODERNISATION

The Director of Lifelong Learning introduced a report to outline the process for commissioning community consultation for Area Review of Secondary School Provision, in accordance with the Council's School Modernisation Strategy.

The Director advised that the Authority was committed to working with schools and communities to secure high quality learning opportunities for all and to use its resources efficiently and effectively to secure better outcomes and value for money. He commented that all Secondary Schools in Flintshire were improving schools and committed to successful outcomes for learners. He referred to the challenge to ensure that Flintshire schools continued to provide an appropriate 'fit for purpose' environment for the 21st century at a time when limited funds were available to deliver increasing expectations.

The Director referred to the 2009 ESTYN report on the strategic management of education in Flintshire which identified addressing school modernisation as a key recommendation. Although considerable preparatory work had been undertaken over the last few years the 2011 14-19 Area Inspection recommended that there was still a major challenge to address inefficient provision. The 2009 School Modernisation Strategy sets out that consultation would take place to develop a plan for the future of local educational provision under a number of circumstances, including when schools have more than 25% surplus places. The Director gave a detailed presentation to the Committee on the Flintshire School Modernisation Strategy in terms of Secondary School Reorganisation which covered the following main points:

- School Organisation: a Statutory duty of the Local Authority
- Working in partnership
- Regional and National action
- North Wales and Flintshire

- Educational Offer, Surplus Places, Suitability, Condition & Community usage
- Secondary School capacity and surplus places (January 2011)
- Strategic direction
- Case for Change
- Value for money
- Building on success
- Consultation and Decision making
- Options Appraisals

During discussion a number of queries and concerns were expressed by Members on surplus places, the future of 6th Form provision, creation of “super-schools”, proposals for rationalisation of secondary schools, demographic change and the condition of school buildings. The Executive Member for Education and the Director responded to the issues raised. The Director advised that the Welsh Government, Estyn and the Wales Audit Office had tasked Local Authorities in Wales to reduce surplus places in their school provision in response to the general downturn in pupil numbers and to ensure that resources were best used to improve learning opportunities and outcomes. The Director also reported that the future allocation of funding to improve learning environments was likely to be dependent on reducing surplus capacity or finding alternative uses. He cited the recent Thomas review which recommended tying capital investment to producing a resilient plan to reduce local surplus places to below 10%.

Councillor C.A. Thomas and other Members raised a number of concerns during the meeting concerning the lack of detailed information as to which schools were involved. She requested costings on how much surplus places cost the Authority financially. Councillor Thomas also advised that she had referred to a survey on Welsh medium provision and raised questions regarding the provision of Welsh medium education in the school modernisation strategy.

On the subject of school buildings the Director advised that maintaining under-used buildings incurred costs and any savings made from the removal of surplus would be directed to the front-line educational provision. The Executive Member for Education commented on the £40m repair and maintenance backlog of school buildings which was being addressed but required ongoing commitment.

In conclusion the Director stated that no proposals for the reorganisation of schools had been put forward as these would result from consultation with all relevant stakeholders. He advised that approval would be sought from the Executive to start a process of community consultation, which would involve Governors, Staff, Unions, Parents, Students and the wider Communities. Options would be formulated as a basis for local area discussion and an invitation extended to consultees to put forward their own options for consideration by the Authority.

Councillor A.P. Shotton proposed that Members note the report. The Chairman referred to the recommendation in the report that Members considered an initial options appraisal in relation to each area and it was agreed that a workshop would be held on 30 June 2011 to discuss the options appraisal.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee consider an initial options appraisal in relation to each area at a workshop to be held on 30 June 2011.

4. 14-19 EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

The Director of Lifelong Learning provided copies of the Area inspection report on the quality and standard of provision for 14 to 19-year-old learners in Flintshire which had just been published for Members' information. He commented on the very positive findings outlined in the report which were the best in Wales. The outcome of the report reflected the quality of 14 to 19 education provision in Flintshire and acknowledged the positive partnership work undertaken and the wellbeing of pupils and students in the area. The significant trend of improvement in the performance of Flintshire secondary schools at key stage 4 had also been recognised.

The Director invited Mr. K Grandfield, Secondary School Phase Officer, to provide an overview of the report and to outline the recommendations and main findings.

Members expressed their congratulations and appreciation to the Director and Officers for the hard work and commitment of all involved in maintaining high standards and the achievement of such positive outcomes to the ESTYN inspection.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the update be received; and
- (b) That the Director and Officers be congratulated on the hard work and commitment of all involved in maintaining high standards and the achievement of such positive outcomes to the ESTYN inspection.

5. QUARTER 4/YEAR END PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2010/11

The Chairman invited the Heads of Service to present their Quarter 4 performance reports for the period January to March 2011, and provide an update on the Strategic Assessment of Risks and Challenges (SARC) within the reports. Members were also asked to note the progress made against

the Improvement Target Action Plans contained within the performance reports.

Leisure Services

The Head of Culture and Leisure explained that in future the quarterly report for Leisure Services would be combined with the quarterly report for Libraries, Culture and Heritage to provide a single update for both areas. There was currently only one national performance indicator for Leisure Centres which recorded the number of visits to Local Authority Sport and Leisure Centres during the year. The number of recorded visits during Q4 was 2.16% up on Q4 in 2009/10 and for the full year 2010/11 there was a 1.87% increase on 2009/10.

The Welsh Assembly Free Swimming Initiative in Flintshire had more people aged 16 years and under attending free structured activities than any other Authority in Wales. The scheme would be placing more emphasis on the development of swimming ability and structured activities in the future.

The key actions and progress in relation to the four-year Partnering Agreement with Alliance Leisure Services, the Leisure Services' Action Plan, development and implementation of Flintshire's Play Strategy and programme of improvement for fixed equipment play areas across the County were outlined.

Libraries, Culture and Heritage

On the Welsh Public Library Standards, there was a requirement to establish and report on customer satisfaction. The most recent survey of children under 16 which was conducted in February and March 2011, would be reported to a future meeting of the Committee.

Referring to the Archive Service an increase of 18% had been achieved in Service users between 2009/10 and 2010/11. The upgrade of the library management system which the Library Service operated jointly with Denbighshire County Council had been completed. The service now had improved presence on the Council's website which it was anticipated would attract increased virtual access to library service resources and facilities. Virtual visits had increased by 5% between 2009/10 and 2010/11.

Councillor D.I. Mackie asked for an update on progress to develop a new library at Saltney. The Head of Culture and Leisure advised that the Economic Development Department was undertaking a feasibility study of the proposed Saltney Library Project. A meeting had been held with representatives of the Town Council, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and the Environment Directorate and it was envisaged that tenders for the contract would be sent out in November. The project was still achievable within the timescale agreed.

Schools Services

The progress and developments in the Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2, More Able and Talented, English, Maths, Science, Welsh, ICT, Leadership, Improvement and Accountability, Intervention and Support and Working with Others were outlined.

Development and Resources

The School Modernisation Strategy was now being implemented and the programme of infant/junior amalgamations was progressing well. Work had started on the new school at Connah's Quay which was to be completed by Summer 2012. Following the funding received in tranche 3 of the Welsh Assembly School Building Improvement Grant, design work was being undertaken for a new primary school at Shotton which was expected to be completed by December 2013.

Post-16 transformation was a priority area for development and would form a major workstream for the foreseeable future. Discussions with Post-16 providers were progressing and a process for options appraisal had been formulated. On Service Level Agreements the Head of Service advised that following a review by the Traded Services Group a list of the Agreements had been sent to all schools with a response required by Easter. However, not all schools had replied to date and insufficient take-up of the services offered would impact on central service provision. An update would be provided to the Committee on this matter at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the reports be noted.

6. PLAY AREAS

The Chairman asked Members to consider the report on the findings and recommendations of the Play Areas Task Group of the Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor C.A. Thomas provided background information and reported that the Task Group had met on three occasions and had undertaken site visits to the 'red' play areas identified in the Play Areas Survey. On the key considerations in the report she emphasised the importance to a child's development of having access to free, open play areas where children could come and go as they pleased without relying on parents to escort them. She commented on a lack of provision for older children which needed to be addressed and the need for play areas to be incorporated into planning consent. The Match Funding scheme had proved to be very successful with "good take up" from Town and Community Councils. It was suggested that criteria should be agreed for the allocation of match funding for future years.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That consultation takes place with local ward members and residents regarding the future of Primrose Street play area in Connah's Quay;
- (b) That the Planning Protocol Working Group give further consideration to provision for play areas within planning mechanisms to ensure sustainable play provision in the future;
- (c) That criteria be agreed for future match funding schemes for play areas;
- (d) That Town and Community Councils be made aware of the results and implications of the Play Areas Survey;
- (e) That an advice booklet be developed for community groups and consideration be given to identifying mentors to work with local communities to improve play areas; and
- (f) That the Vice-Chair of the Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee be requested to present the report on behalf of the Committee to the Executive.

7. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Learning and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator, introduced the Forward Work Programme of the Committee.

Members reviewed the current programme and agreed that the following items be scheduled for consideration at the meeting of the Committee on 22 September 2011:

- 14-19 educational provision
- Q1 performance report
- Outline Business Plan – Transforming Education: Provision of Schools Improvement Services

A workshop would be arranged on 30th June 2011 to give Members of the Committee and Members whose wards may be affected by proposals, an opportunity to consider options in relation to secondary school provision in Flintshire. There would also be an opportunity to suggest alternative options for consideration.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the above, the Forward Work Programme be amended, received and noted.

8. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were eleven members of the public present.

9. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS

There were three members of the press present.

10. DURATION OF THE MEETING

The meeting commenced at 2.00 p.m. and concluded at 5.30 p.m.

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Chairman

SUMMARY OF DECLARATIONS MADE BY MEMBERS
IN ACCORDANCE WITH FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S
CODE OF CONDUCT

LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE		DATE: 9 June, 2011
MEMBER	ITEM	MINUTE NO.
Councillors R.P. MacFarlane, R. Dolphin, Q.R.H. Dodd, J.E. Falshaw, H.T. Howorth, C. Legg, D.L. Mackie, D.I. Mackie, I.B. Roberts, A.P. Shotton W.O. Thomas and C.A. Thomas <u>Co-opted members:</u> Mr. D. Hytch, and Mrs. R. Price	School Modernisation	3