

LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday 24th January 2008 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillors N. Hugh-Jones (Chair), D. Cooper, S. Frobisher, M.M. Jones, G.J. Pickering, N.P. Roberts and M.A. Webster together with Co-opted Members D. Edwards, G. Greenland, G. Hughes, D. Smith, C. Thomas and D. Wilson

Observers: Councillors R.E. Barton, M. Ll. Davies, G.C. Evans, K.N. Hawkins, G.M. Kensler (Lead Cabinet Member for Promoting Denbighshire), D. Owens, J. Thompson-Hill (Lead Cabinet Member for Finance)

ALSO PRESENT

Interim Corporate Director Lifelong Learning, Corporate Director Resources, Head of Policy and Performance (Lifelong Learning), Head of Partnership and Inclusion, Interim Head of School Improvement, Head of Countryside and Leisure, Head of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, Financial Controller (R. Parry), Senior Management Accountant (S. Halewood), Quality and Evaluation Officer (G. Wyn Jones), Programme Manager Lifelong Learning (J. Curran), Scrutiny Support Officer (S. Price) and Administration Officer (K.E. Jones).

APOLOGIES

Co-opted Members D. Hesketh and M. Stallard

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair:-

- (i) referred to the sad loss of Councillor Tom K. Hodgson who had recently passed away and members stood in silent tribute;
- (ii) welcomed back from her recent trip Co-opted Member G. Greenland, and
- (iii) registered his thanks for all her hard work to Gill Yates, Business and Performance Manager (Lifelong Learning) and former Scrutiny Support Officer who would be leaving the authority shortly to take up an appointment at Flintshire County Council.

694 URGENT MATTERS

In accordance with Section 100B (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair declared that he intended to include for discussion the following matters which required urgent attention :-

(i) Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn

Councillor G.J. Pickering referred to the position on the 52 week residential unit at Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn which remained at a projected overspend and he sought an update on the latest position. The Head of Partnership and Inclusion reported that the authority was working closely with the school and other colleagues on a solution and that there may be a contribution by the Welsh Assembly Government. A further meeting with the Welsh Assembly was scheduled for 7th February and members would be kept informed of progress. Reference was also made to the initial delay in opening the school; current capacity issues and provision at the facility, and measures being undertaken to fill the vacant places. Councillor J. Thompson-Hill indicated that he had been assured that a solution would be found this financial year and there was an expectation that there would be no overspend in the next financial year.

RESOLVED that the current position regarding Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn be noted.

(ii) Capital Plan – Yellow Bus Purchase

Councillor G.J. Pickering referred to the report on the Capital Plan considered by County Council on 22nd January and raised concerns that this scrutiny committee had not been given the opportunity to scrutinise the element relating to the purchase of a yellow bus prior to the Council's decision. Councillor J. Thompson-Hill referred to the general process for capital bids involving submissions to the Capital Strategy Group prior to Cabinet and Council. Members noted that this committee had considered a report on the development of yellow buses in Denbighshire at their meeting in June 2007.

RESOLVED that the prioritisation process for capital bids be noted.

695 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th December 2007 were submitted:-

Matters Arising –

Page 6 – Item No. 5 – Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Llangollen Canal World Heritage Site Nomination – Councillor R.E. Barton referred to the acceptance of the application for World Heritage Status and the potential associated tourism benefits and felt that additional investment was required to promote the nomination and reap the benefits. The Head of Tourism, Heritage and Culture agreed that, in order to take full advantage of the nomination and potential for World Heritage Status, further investment would be required. It was noted that Wrexham County Borough Council had committed significant funding for the development of the bid and subsequent promotion.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11th December 2007 be approved.

The minutes of the meeting held on 13th December 2007 were submitted:-

Matters Arising –

Page 7 – Item No. 6 – Estyn Action Plan Update and the Role of Scrutiny – The Chair paid tribute to the hard work and dedication of all those involved in the development of the Estyn Action Plan.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13th December 2007 be approved.

696 MODERNISING EDUCATION IN DENBIGHSHIRE

The Head of Policy and Performance submitted a report (previously circulated) informing the committee of progress of the Action Plan in response to the Estyn inspection and of the work of the Modernising Education Board (MEB). A summary of the main recommendations within the Estyn Inspection report had been attached to the report (Appendix 1) highlighting progress and risk status together with further information on an exception basis (Appendix 2). It was recommended that the committee review the initial progress and identify any areas of work where they would wish to have further clarification within the next monthly monitoring report.

Members noted from the report that against the scheduled 56 actions for completion, 10 actions remained outstanding. The MEB had considered a progress report at its meeting on 14th January and agreed to amend a number of dates of actions in view

of changing circumstances and to delete two actions from the plan which were no longer necessary. At its meeting on 23rd January, the MEB had also reviewed progress against those activities for Recommendation 1.1 where revised completion dates had been suggested. Consequently the overall recommendation was recorded as high risk although work was progressing on target against the remaining recommendations within that work plan. Finally reference was made to the monitoring requirements for the Estyn review of Youth Support Services and the Cambridge Modernising Education report together with this committee's role in that regard.

The Head of Policy and Performance referred to the hour-long session held immediately before this meeting on Estyn Action Plan issues and reiterated the rationale behind the traffic light system red/amber/green to highlight and monitor progress and risk status. At the Chair's request the Head of Policy and Performance agreed to circulate contact names and numbers of the officers responsible for particular actions as detailed within the report.

Councillor R.E. Barton raised some concern regarding the terminology 'Modernising Education' used in the report which he felt had connotations of Cambridge Education's report which he believed should be scrutinised separately. The Interim Corporate Director Lifelong Learning explained that the Modernising Education Agenda comprised of the Estyn LEA Inspection; Cambridge Education's Report, and the Youth Support Services Inspection and how the authority was responding to those matters. All three areas defined the Modernising Agenda in Denbighshire and there were overlapping elements between them. Regular reports incorporating elements of all three areas would be reported to the scrutiny committee. The Interim Corporate Director further advised that the MEB would be focusing their attention on the red/amber areas and therefore he recommended that the scrutiny committee focused on the green areas so as to avoid duplication and complement the work of the MEB.

During consideration of the report members took the opportunity to raise questions regarding current progress with particular recommendations and it was agreed that the committee should focus on a number of key recommendations from each group detailed in Appendix 1 to the report. With that in mind and based on information and discussions during the pre meeting session on the Estyn Action Plan it was agreed to focus on the following key areas:-

Appendix 1 – Action Plan in response to Estyn Inspection Report 2007

- **R.1.1** – Identifying the reasons why the overall attainment of pupils, particularly at Key Stage 4, is low and what needs to be done to improve it
- **R.2.5** – Improving relationships and communication between parts of social and education services to successfully implement the Children Act 2004
- **R.2.6** – Using the scrutiny function to establish clear accountability and challenge robustly officers, members and services who are accountable for raising standards and improving the quality of provision
- **R.3.2** – Prioritising resources according to the needs of children, young people and schools
- **R.3.5** – Working openly with schools to improve their understanding of funding decisions and processes

Appendix 2 – Exception Reporting

The Interim Head of School Improvement reported that many of the suggested revised dates for Recommendations 1.1 referred to matters under her jurisdiction. At

the time the report had been prepared she had only just started in post and had not had the opportunity to respond to those recommendations. The Interim Head of Service reported that she had been scrutinised by the MEB at their meeting the previous day when the progress highlighted with amber status had been amended to green.

The Chair queried the implications for timetable slippage and the Head of Policy and Performance advised that it was inevitable that some actions would slip due to changes in circumstances. However each of the plans would be vigorously monitored to ensure that there was a justifiable reason behind any delay. Each work plan had been costed and built into the budget plan.

The Chair thanked the Head of Policy and Performance and the Programme Manager for the pre meeting presentation and the report provided.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) *the work progressed to date to ensure that the recommendations contained within the Estyn Education Services report were addressed be noted, and*
- (b) *recommendations R.1.1, R.2.5, R.2.6, R.3.2 and R.3.5 as detailed above be identified as the committee's priority areas requiring further consideration at the Committee's February meeting.*

697 BUDGET 2008/09 UPDATE

The Interim Corporate Director Lifelong Learning and the Financial Controller submitted a joint report (previously circulated) advising members of progress with the budget setting exercise for the Lifelong Learning Directorate and seeking members' views on the proposals for cost savings and the directorate's prioritisation of the bids for additional resources for service pressures next financial year. The committee's views on the budget proposals would be submitted to the Cabinet. [The committee had considered the directorate's initial proposals at their meeting on 8th January and had resolved to receive the latest budget proposals at this meeting together with further background information.]

The Interim Corporate Director Lifelong Learning reminded members that they had previously agreed to increase the Education budget by £1m to address Estyn related matters and education transport. Further budget bids had also been submitted and it was hoped that an additional £750k could be achieved which would constitute a significant funding increase for Education. With regard to efficiency savings the directorate had a target of £400k and initial work undertaken delivered proposed savings to the potential value of £292k. It was a directorate priority to carry out further work to increase the level of efficiency savings which could be delivered. The £400k savings target was a significantly lower percentage of the budget than other directorate's targets and whilst it would not be easy to deliver the Interim Corporate Director considered that it was a reasonable amount to find. Overall the Corporate Director felt that, whilst the proposals were good news for education, there were pressures on other areas of the Lifelong Learning Directorate.

Savings Proposals – Partnership & Inclusion and School Improvement

The report detailed identified savings proposals amounting to £23k against a target of £65k for Partnership and Inclusion. The Head of Partnership and Inclusion advised that a further £32k had subsequently been identified and she was confident that the savings target would be met for this service. School Improvement had been set a savings target of £67k and the Interim Corporate Director confirmed that the Interim Head of School Improvement would be identifying appropriate savings. He assured members that the savings would be achieved without affecting the education priorities.

Councillor G.J. Pickering felt that the Lifelong Learning Directorate had incurred more cuts previously than other directorates and he referred to the work of the Committee's Finance Working Group and the need for additional funding for education. Councillor J. Thompson-Hill indicated that other directorates had expressed the same view in respect of their own services and advised that the Lifelong Learning Directorate's contribution had been reduced from £776k to £400k.

Savings Proposals – Countryside and Leisure

Councillor D. Cooper expressed his concern regarding the proposals to reduce the Beach Lifeguard Service and delete the Active Lifestyles Officer post which he felt could result in higher levels of staff sickness absence. Councillor G.J. Pickering highlighted that Rhyl had been named the busiest lifeboat station in Wales during 2007 and queried whether that fact had been taken into account when considering reductions to the Beach Lifeguard Service.

The Head of Countryside and Leisure highlighted that the service savings target of £78k amounted to 20% of the Lifelong Learning Directorate's overall target despite Countryside and Leisure only representing 4% of the directorate's total budget. Proposals (i) – (vi) within the report were genuine non controversial efficiency savings amounting to £31k. However, proposals (vii) – (x) were simply cuts in services. The rationale behind those proposals were to minimise staff redundancies and the impact on service delivery and the Head of Service elaborated upon those proposals as follows:-

- (vii) Reduce Beach Lifeguard Service – the Council currently provided a premier service during May – September and the proposal was to provide a reduced service from May and provide the main service for the peak 8 week season (July – September). Savings could be made in this manner without resorting to redundancies because of the temporary/casual staff employed. The service would be increased during bank holiday periods and peak season. The position of the RNLI and the Coastguard had been taken into account when making the proposal.
- (viii) Cut Active Lifestyles Officer Post – the current post holder would be leaving shortly and it was likely that approval would not be forthcoming to fill the position in any event.
- (ix) Close Events Arena water feature/fountains – the fountain had been reinstated two years ago but there was a cost in keeping the feature open.
- (x) Close Llantysilio Green Public Toilets – the location of the toilets falls within the buffer zone for the World Heritage Site nomination but there were currently difficulties in maintaining the toilets and it was proposed to close the facilities until a solution could be found. [Councillor G.C. Evans suggested that approaches be made to Llantysilio Community Council regarding maintenance of the toilet facilities which had proved successful in other parts of the county.]

Whilst noting that further efficiency savings needed to be identified by the directorate and that revisions may be made to existing proposals, Councillor N.P. Roberts sought assurances that the scrutiny committee would be given the opportunity to scrutinise any further proposals identified prior to their submission to Cabinet/Council for approval. The Financial Controller advised that the directorate were currently working on identifying the additional £108k required to meet the £400k savings target. It was suggested that members should consider the latest proposals submitted to the Cabinet on 30th January and if necessary, a special meeting of the committee could be convened to consider the latest position. Councillor G.C. Evans, Chair of Resources Scrutiny Committee advised that the budget proposals would be

submitted to Resources Scrutiny on 31st January and all members were welcome to attend that meeting.

Savings Proposals – Tourism, Heritage and Culture

Members expressed concern regarding the loss of the mobile library service, particularly for those in rural areas and the subsequent impact on education. The Head of Tourism, Heritage and Culture advised that whilst reluctant to reduce provision, the Principal Librarian had felt that if the Library Service had to make a contribution it was preferable to lose the mobile service rather than cuts being made to permanent libraries. Additional savings to be considered also included reductions in library opening times.

The Head of Tourism, Heritage and Culture reported that the initial savings target of £110k for the service had been increased to £189k. Further proposals had been identified over a three year period which involved a restructure of the service as a reasonable strategic way of reducing staffing levels as required. However the Head of Service raised concerns regarding the £90k identified relating to the reduced grant subsidy for internal and external Heritage and Culture assets as follows:-

- Bodelwyddan Castle £20k (current subsidy approximately £180k)
- Pavilion Theatre, Rhyl £50k (current subsidy approximately £524k)
- Royal International Pavilion £20k (current subsidy approximately £170k)

The Head of Service advised of the likely implications arising from the reduced subsidy including the possibility that the Bodelwyddan Castle Trust would cease to function and management responsibility transferred to the authority resulting in an increase in costs. With regard to the Pavilion Theatre, Rhyl, the Head of Service indicated that the facility would be operated at a deficit and would likely result in a three month closure during the year; the reduction in expenditure would subsequently result in a further reduction of income. The Corporate Director Resources felt that £50k reduction in subsidy would be acceptable when considering the annual turnover of the Pavilion Theatre was approximately £1.5m. The Head of Service advised that the subsidy generated income for the facilities which would be lost if the subsidy was reduced. In response to questions the Head of Service confirmed that advance programming and staffing issues had not been taken into account.

Councillor G.M. Kensler highlighted that 65% of the overall £400k savings target for the Lifelong Learning Directorate had been required from Culture and Leisure services.

Bids for Additional Resources - Schools

The Interim Corporate Director reported upon the list of bids on behalf of schools and recommended that the School Budget Forum (SBF) should be prioritising the schools pressures based upon the growth increase approved by the authority. The Senior Management Accountant confirmed that the SBF would be meeting on 7th February in order to discuss the proposed bids.

Bids for Additional Resources – Countryside and Leisure

Councillor G.M. Kensler highlighted the loss of Performance Incentive Grant (PIG) funding for the following areas: GP Exercise Referral Scheme (£31k); Health Walking Schemes (£20k) and Biodiversity Officer/NERC Act Duties (£20k) and the potential for redundancies arising therefrom. Members supported the reinstatement of the PIG funding, particularly in view of the impact on workplace health, health inequalities and public health problems. Councillor J. Thompson-Hill reported that the service should not become reliant on PIG funding and an exit strategy for the three areas should have been developed.

Bids for Additional Resources – Tourism, Heritage and Culture

The Head of Tourism, Heritage and Culture reported upon a recent article published in the Daily Post which had misinterpreted this aspect of today's report. He clarified that the proposed additional grant of £60k to the Bodelwyddan Castle Trust would be dependant upon the hotel chain taking up the option to purchase the freehold of their current footprint on the site which would negate their need to pay an annual rental to the Trust and would have a significant impact on their finances. There were no plans to sell the site occupied by the Trust.

Following review of the budget proposals some members felt that, in the current circumstances, it was not reasonable to expect the Lifelong Learning Directorate to find efficiency savings of £400k and Councillor G.J. Pickering proposed, seconded by Councillor N.P. Roberts that the committee recommends the directorate's savings target be reduced to £200k. The committee also reiterated those savings proposals which they were unable to support. Councillor J. Thompson-Hill reminded members that any reduction in the Lifelong Learning Directorate's efficiency target would result in those savings being found by other directorates or an increase in Council Tax.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) *the following savings proposals be not supported by the committee:-*

*Reduction of the Beach Lifeguard Service (25k)
Deletion of the Active Lifestyles Officer post (£17k)
Withdrawal of the Mobile Library Service (£18k)*

(b) *in light of the considerable pressure on education and culture and leisure service budgets, the committee recommends that the Directorate's savings target be set at £200k, and*

(c) *the committee recommends that the Directorate's bid to replace Performance Incentive Grant funding (£71k) be supported.*

At this juncture (4.50 p.m.) the committee adjourned for a refreshment break

698 DENBIGHSHIRE PLAY STRATEGY

A report by the Head of Countryside and Leisure seeking members views on the draft Denbighshire Play Strategy and Implementation Plan, had been circulated prior to the meeting. Owing to the extended discussion on the previous items of business, the Committee **agreed** that there was insufficient time to consider the Play Strategy at today's meeting.

699 WELSH LANGUAGE AND THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTNERSHIP

A report by the Children and Young People's Partnership Support Team's Quality and Evaluation Officer had been circulated prior to the meeting.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

700 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Support Officer submitted a report (previously circulated) for members to review the committee's forward work programme and consider relevant issues arising from the committee's work.

The Scrutiny Support Officer referred to the earlier extensive consideration of issues relating to modernising education and the recent Estyn inspections and confirmed

that the committee's forward work programme would include monthly reviews of progress.

Following the committee's decision to identify key stages 3 and 4 as priority areas for the committee to review, it was confirmed that an overview of all key stages would be brought before the committee in March to provide context for members' deliberations.

In respect of consideration in March of the 'Webb' review into the mission and purpose of Further Education in Wales, it was suggested by a member that it would be helpful for the committee to know the views of the secondary schools.

Confirmation was received that the committee's February meeting would be held at Blessed Edward Jones Catholic High School and that a progress report on the School would be submitted for consideration. The committee requested confirmation of whether previous reports submitted to the Corporate Governance Committee and containing exempt information, could be circulated to the committee's co-opted membership. The Scrutiny Support Officer agreed to seek clarification.

Members were informed that the Corporate Governance Committee had asked the Scrutiny Committee to consider whether the school uniform grants schemes were being fully utilized. After debating the issue with officers it was **agreed** that the Head of Policy and Performance would liaise with the officers administering the scheme to ensure that the potential demand from parents was being met.

The committee sought clarification on the terms of reference and reporting arrangements to the Scrutiny Committee of the Schools Standards Monitoring Group and was advised by the Scrutiny Support Officer that proposals were being prepared by the Interim Head of School Improvement. A member suggested that notes of the Group's meetings could be stored on the Council's web-site and the Head of Policy and Performance advised that officers were currently looking into that.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme as detailed in Appendix 1 be approved.

The meeting concluded at 5.30 p.m.
