

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 24 September 2015 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Richard Davies (Vice-Chair), Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Arwel Roberts and Gareth Sandilands

Co-opted Members:- G Greenland, D Houghton, Dr D Marjoram, J Piper and G Williams

Lead members attendance requested by the Committee:- Councillors Eryl Williams and Hugh Irving

Observer:- Councillor Martyn Holland

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (MM), Head of Education (KIE), 14-19 Network Co-ordinator (JG), Principal Manager, Business Support (TW), Corporate Complaints Officer (CO'G), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE) and Committee Administrator (SLW)

Dr Alwyn Jones, Head of Standards, GwE

Marc Berw Hughes, Senior Challenge Advisor, Conwy & Denbighshire Hub, GwE

Celia Jones, Assistant Principal of Coleg Llandrillo

Martin Evans – Programme Manager, Rhyl Sixth

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Meirick Davies, Colin Hughes, Peter Owen, Dewi Owens, Merfyn Parry and David Simmons

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillors Geraint Lloyd Williams and Martyn Holland declared a personal interest in items 5, 6 and 7.

Education Co-optees, G. Greenland, D. Houghton, Dr. D. Marjoram and J Piper declared a personal interest in items 5, 6 and 7.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters.

4 PROVISIONAL EXAMINATION RESULT

Provisional External Examinations and Teacher Assessments

The Lead Member for Education, Councillor Eryl Williams, introduced the Provisional External Examinations and Teacher Assessments report (previously circulated). The report had been presented to provide Members with information regarding the performance of Denbighshire schools teacher assessment and external examinations on the basis of final verified data of Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2/3 and external examinations at KS4 and Post 16.

The Head of Education, Karen Evans, introduced Dr Alwyn Jones, Head of Standards, GwE, and Marc Berw Hughes, Senior Challenge Advisor – Conwy/Denbighshire Hub, GwE to the Committee.

The Head of Education confirmed that all results at Key Stage 4 were provisional and verified results would be available in November and benchmarked data in December 2015.

The Local Authority had identified with GwE that mathematical development within the Foundation Phase had been an area that merited focus with a view to improvement.

Despite an improvement in Key Stage 2 (KS2) results in 2015 compared to the previous year, Denbighshire's rank position had dropped due to the fact that results had improved within other Local Authorities. At KS2 level it had become apparent that there would be a requirement for intervention at an earlier stage in a pupil's education journey, possibly at the Foundation Phase. This would provide support to the pupil during the early part of their education and help them achieve their potential at KS2.

Key Stage 3 (KS3) results had improved for the seventh year, which had been extremely encouraging.

The unverified external examination results for 2015 had been disappointing as levels 1 and 2 results had remained static or generally registered a dip in performance compared to previous years.

Key Stage 5 (KS5) results had been similar to the grades achieved in the previous year.

Responding to Members' questions, the Head of Education and GwE Officers advised that:

- In the Foundation Phase Denbighshire, similar to other Local Authorities, had been concentrating on literacy and as a result, mathematical skills had suffered. This had been the reason in future to focus on mathematical development and to identify special educational needs (SEN) at an early stage in a pupil's development in order to target the correct intervention and

provide support to them. Without targeted support at an early stage, pupils could struggle with all Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematical (STEM) subjects in due course;

- It had been disappointing to note that good performing high schools had appeared to have slipped against previous performance this year, as had those schools who had until recent years received intensive external support. This was attributed to the fact that GwE, during its initial period since its establishment, had concentrated a lot of its resources and work in the primary sector, to the detriment of the secondary sector. There was particular disappointment with Rhyl High School as its results this year had been on a par with the results attained when it had been under special measures. This would be an urgent area for intervention and improvement. Rhyl High School had requested a number of its pupils' examination papers be re-marked. Council and GwE Officers had met with Estyn representatives, the Headteacher and Governors to discuss the results and associated concerns. It had been agreed that a mini Recovery Board be established, comprising of the Local Authority, School and Independent representatives, with a view to addressing the problems (some of which had been identified by Estyn two years earlier) and to improving outcomes for pupils;
- At a recent meeting with Welsh Government (WG) Officials, GwE and Local Authority representatives agreed there was a need for Human Resources Departments to be aware of capability issues relating to individual teachers at an early stage with a view to supporting them to acquire the necessary skills to achieve the best possible outcomes for pupils;
- There was also a necessity for Headteachers to draw to the attention of their Governing Body, any areas of concern and risk at an early stage. This would ensure that the Governing Body performed its role in a robust and challenging manner to ensure support for pupils to achieve their full potential;
- There had been no indication during the 2014/15 school year that the performance of the County's pupils in external examinations had been likely to decline;
- Individual schools set their own targets;
- During the autumn term of 2015 GwE would attempt to visit all school Governing Bodies to challenge and test the targets they had set and to undertake work with Governors to upskill them to be more robust and challenging;
- GwE, as an organisation, had been subject to regular monitoring and challenge from the WG. Two of the other school effectiveness and improvement consortia in Wales had encountered huge challenges and consequently they had received substantial investment from WG. Despite the investment, neither consortia had realised their expected potential. The Lead Member for Education advised that he would raise this with the Minister during their meeting in mid-October;
- The Local Authority employed "link officers" to support foundation phase pupils integrate into school life and identify basic or special needs support. Sometimes there were significant differences between pupils whose families had been supported by "Flying Start" initiatives and others who had not;
- Individual pupils developed at a different pace between the ages of 7 and 11. It would, therefore, be important that any special needs or additional learning

needs were identified at an early stage in order to ensure the best outcomes for those pupils who required support;

- GwE and the Local Authority continually strived to try and support teachers in their role. They tracked their performance and offered appropriate support when required. It was the Governing Body that had the powers to appoint or dismiss teaching staff;
- Whilst the Local Authority took the wellbeing of pupils seriously, it was the external examination results and the eventual outcomes for the pupils on which they were judged.

The Co-opted Members felt it would be important that both GwE and the local Authority provided sufficient training and development to School Governors to assist them to identify the most important data and analyse it correctly

The Chair expressed the gratitude of the Committee to the Head of Education for all her hard work on this issue.

RESOLVED that subject to the above observations the Performance Scrutiny Committee receive the report and to invite the Managing Director of GwE to attend the Performance Committee meeting in January 2016, at which the verified examination results would be presented.

A Level Results of Rhyl Sixth

The Head of Education introduced the Assistant Principal for College Llandrillo, Rhyl – Celia Jones, and the Programme Manager for Rhyl Sixth – Martin Evans.

The Assistant Principal of Llandrillo College, Rhyl, gave an overview of the background to the establishment of the Rhyl Sixth and informed Members that generally the “A” Level and Welsh Baccalaureate results attained by students this year were positive. Statistical information was presented to the Committee illustrating the College’s pass rates and grades in comparison to Denbighshire as a whole, Wales and England.

Responding to Members’ questions, both the Assistant Principal of Coleg Llandrillo and the Programme Manager for Rhyl Sixth advised that:

- They were currently undertaking a piece of work to establish the number of students from Rhyl attending other school or college campuses for their further education, but it had been generally thought that the majority of current students at Rhyl sixth were former pupils of either Rhyl High School or Blessed Edward Jones, along with a few former Ysgol Glan Clwyd pupils;
- There were a variety of reasons for the seemingly high number of students who had dropped out between years 12 and 13. The reasons included a realisation by the students that the “A” level route would not be best for them. Usually these students opted for a more vocationally based course. There were others which gave up their ‘A’ level courses due to a lack of home support for their studies;

- The educational outcomes for all students enrolled at the college were tracked and despite the perception of a high number of students dropping out of “A” level courses between Years 12 and 13 the actual education outcomes for all students were good. All but two who had been through the Rhyl Sixth last year had achieved successful outcomes;
- The College acknowledged the significance of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematic (STEM) subjects and their importance to the local economy and employers. The College worked closely with local industry to attempt to meet their needs and to monitor former students’ progress;
- Similar to school sixth forms, college students would initially study 4 “AS” level subjects in year 12, progressing to 3 “A” levels subjects in year 13. Students would also undertake the Welsh Baccalaureate. Student who were struggling during and at the conclusion of Year 12 would be supported to transfer to other more suitable courses. They would not be expected to leave College;
- Talented and gifted students were supported to realise their full potential, and increasing the number of learners accessing Russell Group Universities had been identified as one of the College’s areas for development for the forthcoming year, as had improving the College’s overall pass rate together with its grades profile.

Responding to members’ concerns on the number of higher education establishments, particularly high ranking universities that were still unwilling to acknowledge the Welsh Baccalaureate as a reputable entrance qualification for higher education in its own right, the Head of Education and 14-19 Network Co-ordinator advised that this was slowly changing. The University of Cambridge had recently announced that it would now recognise the Welsh Baccalaureate as an entry qualification. More work was possibly required with other establishments to attempt to persuade them of the Welsh Baccalaureate’s validity and to educate them on the effort put in by students to gain the qualification.

Prior to the conclusion of the discussion, the 14-19 Network Co-ordinator agreed to provide Members with an information report on the retention and progression of Denbighshire Sixth Forms.

The Chair thanked the College Officials for attending the Committee.

RESOLVED that subject to the above observations, to receive the information on the A Level results of Rhyl Sixth.

5 THE PERFORMANCE OF A* - A STUDENTS AT GCSE AND A LEVEL

The Head of Education introduced a report on the Performance of A*-A students at GCSE and “A” Level (previously circulated), to provide information to Members regarding the performance of Denbighshire A*-A grades in external examinations at Key Stage 4 and Post 16.

During her introduction, she advised that a need had been identified for the future to focus on special educational needs (SEN), free school meals (FSM) and the more able and talented pupils. She advised further that:

- Measures to address the dip in performance at Ysgol Brynhyfryd were being managed via the school's Estyn Action Plan;
- A discussion needed to take place in relation to high performing departments within the Dyffryn Clwyd Partnership and how they could be used to support and deliver their subjects to all students within the area to enable them to realise their optimum outcomes.

Responding to Members' questions, the Head of Education and Officers advised that:

- Whilst some schools had achieved excellent results, there would always be a need to challenge to ensure that standards were sustained and continually improved. Other schools would need to be supported to improve their current results year on year;
- Good results should be used as a benchmark for forthcoming years with schools striving to improve on them year on year;
- There was a need to raise both schools and pupils' aspirations of what would be achievable by them;
- There was also a need to move the most gifted students on to a higher level;
- The performance of both Blessed Edward Jones High School and Rhyl High School in this year's GCSE results were disappointing, particularly bearing in mind the level of improvement in previous years. It seemed that once the intensive support had been withdrawn, pupils' performance had slipped considerably. Analysis had shown that both schools had suffered from a complex set of contributory factors. Consequently, support would be reinstated for both schools in a bid to halt the decline and the Schools Standard Monitoring Group (SSMG) would provide an extra level of challenge to the schools.

Members suggested that it may be beneficial for school governors in future to provide peer support to struggling schools.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (i) To note the performance of schools against previous performance and external benchmarks;*
- (ii) To recommend that more targeted support and challenge be provided for schools in the county to ensure that performance improves; and*
- (iii) That on appropriate balance of support, challenge and accountability is offered to all schools to aim for year on year improvement.*

PART II

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED – that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 13 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

6 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRENT SUPPORT OFFERED TO SCHOOLS WITHIN THE COUNTY IDENTIFIED AS REQUIRING ADDITIONAL INPUT

The Head of Education introduced GwE's Head of Standards and the Senior Challenge Advisor to present their report on the effectiveness of current support offered to schools within Denbighshire identified as requiring additional support and intervention.

Members were advised that GwE during the initial period since its establishment had, in line with the Service Level Agreement (SLA), focussed on the primary sector in Denbighshire, as at that time there were more schools in the amber or red category within the primary sector in the county. This had paid dividend as there were no longer any primary schools categorised as red and fewer categorised as amber in the County. However, there were more primary schools now in the yellow category and two high schools in the red category, which was a cause for concern. Consequently, the focus of the new SLA would be on the provision of intervention and support to the secondary education sector. In response to Members' questions GwE officials:

- Confirmed that it was anticipated that one high school would, in the near future, move from the red category to the amber category, as the implementation of the actions in the Estyn Action Plan progressed;
- Advised that despite GwE's future focus being on the secondary sector the primary sector should not suffer, as the primary sector's challenge advisors would still be working with primary schools;
- Informed the Committee that, as part of GwE's service planning, they were looking at building capacity and resilience within the organisation to meet future demand, for example teachers and head teachers from outside of Denbighshire and recently retired teachers/headteachers, with a proven track record, being commissioned to come in and challenge schools on various aspects of their work;
- Informed members that GwE would also be developing an upskilling programme with a view to supporting and developing future headteachers and managers;
- Confirmed that for the above to be successful there was a need to build a high level of mutual trust between the organisation, teachers and school staff, and governing bodies;
- Advised that a new software tracking system was scheduled to "go live" the following week which should help the local authority and GwE identify any slippages early enough to enable appropriate intervention action to be taken and mitigate the risk of poor results and unsatisfactory outcomes for learners;

- Reassured the Committee that GwE was not complacent and could not afford to let schools in the yellow and green categories slip;
- Advised that for a school to be successful there was a need to strike the appropriate balance between support and accountability for the staff and governing body.
- Emphasised that GwE expected to be rigorously challenged by each local authority's Lead Member for Education and the WG on the value for money aspect of its work.

With respect to the high level of absenteeism, the Head of Education advised that the Council had undertaken a lot of work in this area. The restructure of the Educational Social Work (ESW) Team would also support work on reducing absenteeism. However, the majority of cases of absenteeism were with the parents' consent i.e. withdrawing pupils from schools to go on holiday. Denbighshire had recently issued its first Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) for absenteeism.

Members voiced their concerns on:

- The number of teachers currently applying for headteacher training and headteacher posts;
- The number of very good teachers who were leaving the teaching profession to go and work for GwE and other education organisations;
- The potential for a school to be successful or unsuccessful dependent upon the quality of its headteacher and school leadership team and the potential risk caused to a school's success if its' successful headteacher/teacher was seconded by GwE to challenge/support "failing schools". Staff were under enough stress already without having additional expectations placed on them;
- The support available to governing bodies when they were appointing staff, particularly headteachers; and
- The support available to headteachers to cover their work when they attended training;
- The amount of financial and human resources available to GwE for it to undertake its work effectively; and
- On the long-term outlook for Rhyl High School based on its disappointing results in 2015.

Council Officers advised:

- That some of the top performing schools in England did not receive any support from local authorities, schools in Denbighshire should also aspire for a culture of non-dependency;
- That there was a need to appoint the right people to lead schools, by widening the field to attract the elite candidates, a good headteacher with high aspirations would lead to better outcomes for all and a culture of non-dependency;
- That they had real concerns on the long-term outcomes for one high school; and
- The accountability of governing bodies for appointing staff and for school performance.

Following an in-depth discussion, the Committee:

RESOLVED subject to the Committee's observations –

- (i) *To receive information provided on the support and challenge provided to identified schools, and acknowledge that the support provided to the primary sector had realised positive outcomes;*
- (ii) *Recommended the need to strike an appropriate balance between support, challenge and accountability to schools and school governing bodies;*
- (iii) *Recommended that appropriate training is provide to school governors to enable them to fulfil and sustain their challenge role;*
- (iv) *That a report be presented to the Committee at its January 2016 meeting on the roles and responsibilities of school governing bodies;*
- (v) *That the report on "Verified External Examinations and Teacher Assessments" scheduled for presentation to the Committee in January 2016 include the results of the joint GwE/Denbighshire analysis of the county's pupils' underachievement in 2015; and*
- (vi) *That the Managing Director of GwE be invited to January 2016 meeting.*

PART I - THE PRESS AND PUBLIC ARE INVITED TO ATTEND THIS PART OF THE MEETING

The Scrutiny Coordinator referred to the Constitution and explained the Committee was now inquorate. Members agreed that the meeting proceed on an informal basis and any action taken be ratified at the next meeting of the Committee on 10 December, 2016.

7 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 16 July, 2015 were submitted.

RESOLVED *that following confirmation at the next meeting, the minutes of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held on 16 July 2015 be received and approved as a correct record.*

8 "YOUR VOICE" Q1 2015/2016

The Lead Member for Customers and Libraries introduced the "Your Voice" Q1 2015/2016 report (previously circulated) to provide the Committee with information regarding any performance issues and to make recommendations to address these accordingly.

Responding to Members' questions, the Principal Manager: Business Support and the Corporate Complaints Officer advised that:

- It may be useful for the Committee for future reports to include a brief commentary on the reasons why some services performance against the

“Your Voice” complaints procedure were registering “red” and to include a graph in the report in order to illustrate the current trend with respect to dealing with complaints;

- With regards to the six stage 2 complaints, which had been made by the same customer, the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales had concluded that the Council had to deal with all properly made complaints submitted by this customer. The Committee acknowledged that this could have significant resource implications for the Council, and noted that there was a Policy on “Dealing with unacceptable customer behaviour” which could be used if appropriate.
- The Council’s performance in dealing with the high number of complaints received by the Highways and Environmental Services and the time taken to resolve them was compounded by the very nature of the service and its visibility to all residents, together with the time and financial implications of resolving matters satisfactorily.

RESOLVED

- (i) To receive the information on services’ performance in dealing with complaints; and*
- (ii) That future reports should contain a narrative on the reasons why services were registering “red” in their performance in dealing with complaints and what measures they were taking in a bid to resolve outstanding complaints.*

9 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator introduced the report (previously circulated) regarding the Performance Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme.

It had been agreed that for the 10 December meeting to invite:

- Lead Member for Finance, Corporate Plan and Performance;
- Lead Member for Customers and Libraries; and
- Lead Member for Social Care, Adult and Children’s Services.

28 January 2016 meeting – two further items to be added to the Forward Work Programme:

- School Governors and School Governing Bodies; and
- Verified External Examinations and Teaching Assessments

RESOLVED that subject to the above, the Performance Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

10 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

None.

Prior to the conclusion of the meeting, the Chief Executive noted his disappointment that

only four of the possible ten elected members of the Committee had been in attendance for the meeting, this had rendered the Committee inquorate for the discussion on the non-education items on the business agenda. He thanked the Education Co-opted members for their attendance and input into the discussion and for ensuring that the Committee was quorate for the majority of business items. The fact that no elected members from the Rhyl area were present was, in his view, extremely disappointing, particularly considering the concerns raised within reports presented on the performance of Rhyl High School in this year's external examinations. He advised that he would be raising the matter with Group Leaders, emphasising the importance of attendance at meetings as the Council prepared for a Corporate Inspection from the Wales Audit Office (WAO) in 2016.

The meeting concluded at 12:40 p.m.