

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 28 September 2017 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Ellie Chard, Ann Davies, Martyn Holland, Hugh Irving (Vice-Chair), Huw Jones (Chair), Geraint Lloyd-Williams and Peter Scott. Mrs Kathleen Jones (Co-opted Member) attended for business items 5 and 6.

Cabinet Members – Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts and Councillor Richard Mainon attended at the Committee's invitation for items relating to their portfolio.

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (MM), Head of Education and Children Services (KIE), Senior School Improvement Officer (JM), Head of Customers, Communication and Marketing (LG), Head of Community Support Services (PG), Team Manager – Business Support (BC), Principal Manger – Support Services (AL), Service Improvement Manager (FfA), Statutory and Corporate Complaints Officer (KR), Scrutiny Coordinator (RE) and Democratic Services Officer (KAE).

GwE representatives in attendance for business items 5 and 6: Arwyn Thomas (Managing Director) Jacqueline Chan (Primary Education Sector Lead Advisor – Conwy and Denbighshire) and Paul Matthews-Jones (Secondary Sector Lead Advisor – Conwy and Gwynedd).

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Bob Murray and Co-opted member Gareth Williams.

Tribute to Alastair McNab

The Chair paid tribute to Lead Officer: Operations and Business Support, Alastair McNab, who had died suddenly the previous week. The Chair and Councillor Martyn Holland gave their apologies for having to leave the meeting early to pay their respects at the funeral.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Personal Interests were declared as members of a School Governing Body by Councillors E Chard, H Hilditch-Roberts, M Holland, H Jones, G Lloyd-Williams and P Scott for items 5 and 6.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

There were no urgent items.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held on 13 July 2017 were submitted.

Matters arising:

Item 6 Corporate Risk Register – The response from North Wales Emergency Planning Service had been circulated to members as part of the Information Brief document ahead of the meeting.

Item 7 Corporate Plan (Q4) –

- a) The new Service Manager for Intake and Intervention was Jamie Pope.
- b) The suspension of the Right to Buy Scheme had been granted.

RESOLVED that subject to the above that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2017 be received and approved as a correct record.

5 TEACHER ASSESSMENTS AND PROVISIONAL EXAMINATION RESULTS

The Lead Member for Education introduced the report and appendices (previously circulated) which provided information on the performance of Denbighshire's pupils in relation to the final teacher assessments for the 2016-17 academic year, plus the provisional examination results at Key Stage (KS)4 and post 16 at the end of the summer term 2017.

During his introduction the Lead Member advised that the KS4 results were subject to a different assessment process to previous years and therefore could not be accurately compared to the county's results in preceding years. Education officers and Education Lead Members across Wales had been notified in April 2017 to expect a dip in performance in the 2017 GCSE examination results because of the new assessment process.

The Lead Member also advised that officers had requested that a number of Denbighshire pupils' papers be re-marked as they disputed the grades awarded for them. The outcomes of this process to date had been successful and would be reflected in the verified results when they were presented to Scrutiny in early 2018.

The Head of Education detailed the primary education sector's teacher assessment results emphasising that:

- the Education Service aimed at the conclusion of the Foundation Phase to undertake robust assessments of pupils' abilities. Denbighshire pupils' attainment at the end of the Foundation Phase during 2017 had been 1.7% below target, and ranked 20th out of 22 in Wales – lower than the expected free school meal (FSM) position, but one place above the expected position in the North Wales region. However, through the use of data available to Children's Services officers had been able to understand the challenges faced by individual pupils in the cohort. Work was also being undertaken in conjunction

with Children's Services in relation to these pupils based on Public Health Wales's adverse child experiences work;

- KS2 assessments continued to record an improvement year on year. Achievement now stood at 88.9% with only 6 pupils who were not on the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) register not achieving the Core Subject Indicator (CSI). In addition 37 pupils who had English as an Additional Language (EAL) did not attain the CSI;
- officers from the County's Education Department met with Estyn at the end of each term to discuss attainment and the Regulator had indicated that it did not have concerns about the performance of Denbighshire's primary pupils as the County was aware of each individual pupil's personal circumstances;
- the Education Department did have concerns about the overall performance at KS4, despite all authorities in Wales being advised not to compare the current year's results with previous years' performance;
- the performance of all authorities in Wales at KS4 had dipped in 2017 with the introduction of the new syllabus and grading system;
- Denbighshire's performance profile at KS4 was very interesting as it had the best and third best performing school at KS4 in North Wales, but it also had the poorest performing school;
- neither Welsh or English Literature examination papers this year counted towards the Level 2+, it was only the language examinations and mathematics that were taken into account for the Level 2+; and
- within its county boundaries Denbighshire had the highest number of the most deprived council wards in North Wales, consequently officers were interrogating FSM data to ensure that it accurately reflected the county's performance and to establish whether everyone who was entitled to FSMs were claiming them.

The Catholic Church's co-opted member on scrutiny congratulated the Council on its approach of focussing educational and welfare provision on each individual pupil's specific needs. She felt that this was the correct approach to take, particularly linking the pupil's educational needs to his/her welfare needs as identified by Children Services. In her view having the same officer as the Head of both these important services facilitated this approach and supported the work across both services.

GwE's Managing Director emphasised that:

- 12 pupils represented 1% of the cohort in the performance data, therefore the examination performance of a small number of pupils within the cohort could have a significant impact on the county's overall performance ranking, both regionally and nationally;
- it was important to remember that KS4 performance this year was unchartered territory;
- Denbighshire's contribution to the education agenda in the North Wales region was key. Whilst improving performance in KS4 would be a challenge it was important to remember that Denbighshire's primary sector was performing well and the North Wales region was the best performing region in Wales in the primary sector;
- the gap between pupil attainment at Level 2+ in the region was also closing in comparison to other Welsh regions; and

- in his view, there would be a huge challenge during the forthcoming year with respect to improving pupils' performance in English and Maths, particularly in view of the fact that of the 55 Heads of Mathematics Departments in North Wales at present, 31 of were newly appointed to their posts.

GwE's Primary Lead advised that:

- during the Foundation Phase, which was up to 7 years of age, pupils were assessed on their literacy, mathematical and personal and social development (PSD) skills;
- Denbighshire pupils' performance at the end of the Foundation Phase had declined this year, the first time this had happened since the introduction of the Foundation Phase assessments. Nevertheless, the gap in performance between pupils receiving FSMs and non-FSM pupils was smaller than across the rest of the North Wales region; and
- whilst performance in literacy, mathematics and science at KS2 had improved in Denbighshire, all other counties had also improved against this indicator. However, at KS2 Denbighshire had performed above the expected FSM ranking at both national and regional level. It was also pleasing to report that there was a smaller gap between the performance of pupils at this stage who were in receipt of free school meals and those who were not, and that the performance gap between girls and boys was narrowing.

Responding to members' questions the Lead Member for Education, Education Service Officers and GwE representatives:

- advised that whilst a 'weighting' mechanism did not exist to take into account the effect on a school's performance of having a disproportionate number of ALN or EAL pupils, examination results and teacher assessment data formed only one part of the information available on individual schools. It was important that performance data was considered alongside other available information such as Estyn inspection reports, school categorisation information etc., and not in isolation;
- provided reassurances that the county's Education Service had an individual profile of every pupil in Denbighshire's schools, including ALN pupils attending mainstream schools and those pupils attending its special schools. The Service understood what each pupil was capable of achieving, the support they would require to achieve their full potential, including the needs of those who had complex barriers to overcome in order to achieve their potential;
- confirmed that the county's pupil profiles were consistent with Estyn inspection assessments. GwE analysed this data closely and consequently held the most detailed pupil profile data of all the School Improvement consortia across Wales;
- emphasised that pupils who had Special Educational Needs (SEN) or ALNs were not as likely to achieve multiple A* results. However, the Council had a duty to ensure that they were provided with the best educational experience possible, and one which met their individual needs;
- confirmed that the FSM measure was a WG measure, used by them when reporting on educational performance. Children in receipt of FSMs were not identifiable to their peers in school, they were only identified on school administration systems and County pupil data for the purposes of statistical

- reporting and to ensure that all pupils, whatever their background/circumstances were afforded the same educational opportunities;
- advised that the Council had undertaken some work with Headteachers recently with a view to understanding what services they required for ALN pupils in their schools;
 - confirmed that the KS4 Level 2+ performance results had been adversely impacted this year following the withdrawal of the English/Welsh Literature qualification from the indicator. In addition the assessment method had changed, with 80% of the performance measure now being based on examination results. The mathematical and numeracy element of the KS4 qualification had changed to include mathematical reasoning in daily life;
 - informed the Committee that the -9.3% dip in performance in Denbighshire at KS4 (Level 2+), the largest % dip in the region, was due to a number of factors i.e. the secondment of a high performing school's headteacher, slippages in performance in other schools compared to previous years, performance of pupils in receipt of FSMs etc. The county also had the first and third placed best performing schools in the region as well as the weakest performing school in the region, the extent of this variance in performance impacted on the County's overall performance position;
 - explained the new Welsh Government (WG) Cap 9 measurement, which focussed on each pupil's strongest nine subjects and aggregated their performance score across the selected subjects;
 - confirmed that GwE were currently examining the curriculum offer available at Denbighshire's schools to ensure that it was fit for purpose;
 - confirmed that GwE had an improvement plan in place for each school in Denbighshire and that they worked closely with the Council's Education Service to deliver each plan. Where required specialist officers would be going into schools that were underperforming in a bid to improve outcomes for the pupils;
 - verified that each subject department in every secondary school had been assessed in order to identify their improvement needs;
 - advised that GwE and education officers were currently analysing the data to establish whether the new approach towards assessing pupils at KS4 had contributed towards the decline in performance across the region;
 - confirmed that whilst the secondment of high performing staff to organisations such as GwE could potentially have a detrimental effect on a school's performance, specialist school improvement services had to secure the services of the best people in order to deliver sustainable school improvement across the region. It was therefore important that the correct balance of suitably qualified high calibre staff were maintained at all levels within the education system in order to achieve maximum benefits for all; and
 - advised that the 3 year KS4 average floor target for pupils in receipt of FSMs of 36%, which Denbighshire had only achieved 16.2% and which only one North Wales authority had achieved, was an incremental target set by the WG.

The Head of Education advised members that with regards to the disappointing performance of individual schools that:

- deep concerns had been expressed to the governing body of a school which had permitted the secondment of its Headteacher, although the decline in performance was not attributed to the Headteacher's departure but to one department's under

performance. The Governing Body had been informed that if it was permitting the Headteacher to be seconded it should therefore have robust monitoring arrangements in place for the school's middle managers to ensure that pupils' performance did not suffer;

- senior officials, chair of governors and diocesan representatives of another underperforming school had been invited to meet with her to discuss leadership and management issues, FSM performance, authorised and unauthorised absence rates, and their plans for improvement; and
- having regard to the future closure of both the primary and secondary Catholic schools in Rhyl and the opening of the new 3 – 19 faith school in the town, a primary Headteacher had been appointed to work alongside the present secondary school management team. Thus enabling the monitoring of its improvement and ability to provide support and challenge, with a view to achieving sustainable improvement in readiness for the opening of the new school. Already school absenteeism rates at that school were reducing.

The Lead Member for Education assured the Committee that he had every confidence that the County's Education Service staff and GwE knew the county's schools and their pupils inside out, and that they were making every effort to ensure that each pupil achieved their full potential. He also advised the Committee that the Schools Standards Monitoring Group (SSMG), which would include representatives from the scrutiny committees, would in future be chaired by the Lead Member for Education. SSMG would also be considering GwE's quarterly review reports on a regular basis.

The Lead Member for Education emphasised that whilst the Council and Education Service were generally supportive of the principle of allowing staff to gain additional experience through secondment opportunities, he was of the view that in future it would be beneficial if the details of proposed secondments were shared with the Council for it to submit its observations on their impact to the governing bodies prior to them taking decisions on secondment requests.

Prior to concluding the discussion members' emphasised the need to focus on under performing schools and to support them to a level where they could sustain continual improvement. On this basis the practicalities of inviting Headteachers and Chairs of Governing Bodies of schools who were underperforming and/or encountering severe problems to attend scrutiny to discuss with Committee members their plans for improvements were discussed. Members and the Chief Executive were supportive of this approach.

The Committee:

Resolved: subject to the above observations to -

- (i) receive the information on the performance of the county's schools against previous performance and the external benchmarks that were presently available;***
- (ii) confirm that it had read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment in Appendix 6 as part of its consideration of the information; and***

(iii) invite Headteachers and Chairs of Governing Bodies of schools that were underperforming and/or encountering severe problems to meet with the Committee in future with a view to supporting sustainable long-term improvements.

6 THE NEW GwE CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT PROGRAMME

The Lead Member for Education introduced the report (previously circulated) which provided members with information on the new GwE challenge and support model for Denbighshire's schools - including the revised structure for the organisation and details of its working practices to support school improvement across the North Wales region. Members were advised by the Head of Education and Children's Services that GwE had recently undergone a significant period of change and that officers within Denbighshire were now more confident that the 'new' GwE structure would support school improvement across all education sectors in the county.

GwE's new Managing Director advised that the national formula for school improvement services had given greater emphasis towards the provision of more support to the primary sector. From Denbighshire's perspective this focus had adversely impacted on the secondary sector's performance in the county. Committee members were informed by GwE's Primary and Secondary Lead Officers for Denbighshire that they had been appointed to their respective roles to support schools with the development and delivery of their School Improvement Plans, part of that role included quality assuring those plans to ensure that they would secure improvement and deliver improved outcomes for all pupils. Both of GwE's Lead Officers would meet with the Council's lead education officers on a fortnightly basis to ensure that sustainable improvements were being realised in all schools across the county. GwE officers explained that the new model would entail Level 2 and Level 3 detailed Business Plans from September 2017. These Plans would focus on GwE's six key priorities of:

- standards
- curriculum and assessment
- leadership
- wellbeing
- teaching; and
- business

all of which were detailed in the report. The Level 2 Plans would focus on local authority standards, curriculum and assessment, leadership, well-being and teaching, whilst the higher Level 3 Plans would focus on more specialist areas of the curriculum, GwE's business and governance etc., and comparing performance and outcomes across the region's six local education authority areas.

In response to members' questions GwE and Education Service officers advised that:

- the well-being of every pupil across all school sectors was an integral part of the service provided by both GwE and the local authority, as healthy, resilient and responsible pupils were more likely to realise their full potential;

- the merger of both Education and Children’s Services in Denbighshire under the same Head of Services was regarded as being advantageous and conducive to delivering the well-being agenda; and
- Estyn was due to re-inspect GwE in mid-October 2017

The Chief Executive of Denbighshire County Council informed the Committee that there would always be problems or matters of concern relating to pupils’ education. It was both GwE and the local education authority’s responsibility to identify and understand the ‘problems’ and put measures in place to address and solve them. He advised members that he had confidence in this new model and that it would achieve the desired outcomes. The Committee:

Resolved: -

- (i) subject to the above observations on the revised structure and working practices to support school improvement in Denbighshire’s schools, to endorse the model; and**
- (ii) to confirm that it had read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment as part of its consideration of the above.**

7 'YOUR VOICE' COMPLAINTS REPORT PERFORMANCE

Introducing the ‘Your Voice’ Complaints report for Quarter 4 2016/17 and Quarter 1 2017/18 (previously circulated) the Lead Member for Developing Community Infrastructure advised the Committee that the information was provided to give members an opportunity to scrutinise the Council’s performance in dealing with complaints. The report also outlined how complaints had been used by Council services for the purpose of improving service delivery to residents. During his introduction the Lead Member drew members’ attention to the fact that the number of compliments received during both individual quarters had outnumbered the number of complaints received, which was pleasing. It was also evident from the data that there was no discernible pattern emerging in relation to the complaints received.

Appended to the ‘Your Voice’ report was a report which members had requested on the ‘Customer Dashboard’ – which provided an overview of the customer effort and satisfaction results for the Council for the period September 2016 to August 2017. Introducing this report the Head of Customers, Communication and Marketing outlined the process for evaluating customer feedback and how the feedback received was used to improve Council services. She advised that future ‘Customer Dashboard’ reports should include statistical and data analysis on a service by service basis.

Responding to members’ questions the Lead Member and officers:

- detailed the process for dealing with ‘complaints’, emphasising that ‘complaints’ were different to ‘service requests’;
- advised that ‘service requests’ could be dealt with and resolved earlier if pertinent and specific information was provided by the caller who contacted the Customer Services Centre;

- confirmed that the Council was constantly looking at methods for improving services and for improving accessibility to the complaints process for the public. The Council's website contained all the relevant information on how to make a complaint;
- advised that telephone calls received for service requests or to register a complaint were not audio recorded. Nevertheless, a manual record would be made of each request or complaint received;
- confirmed that certain services, or agencies delivering services on the Council's behalf, were more likely to generate complaints against them e.g. civil enforcement services. This was because of the nature of their work;
- advised that if members felt there was a need to raise awareness of the Council's Corporate Complaints procedure a communications event could be arranged for this purpose; and
- confirmed that the Council welcomed complaints as it viewed them as an effective way to understand problems and consequently improve services.

The Head of Customers, Communication and Marketing undertook to investigate the apparent delay encountered with progressing 'service requests' if the exact postcode for the problem/incident was not known by the person reporting it. She also undertook to ensure that the telephone numbers for the emergency out of hours service were easily accessible on all Council publications, correspondence, website and social media pages.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee:

Resolved: - subject to the above observations to –

- (i) ***receive the report on Council's performance in dealing with complaints, compliments and suggestions received under the 'Your Voice' corporate complaints procedure during Quarter 4, 2016-17 and Quarter 1, 2017-18, and how they were used to improve services to residents; and***
- (ii) ***receive the data on the Customer Effort and Satisfaction results for Denbighshire County Council for the period from September 2016 to August 2017 and how that information had been utilised for the purpose of improving services to the Council's customers and residents.***

8 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator presented the report (previously circulated) seeking Members' review of the Committee's work programme and providing an update on relevant issues.

A copy of the "Member's proposal form" had been included in Appendix 2. The Scrutiny Co-ordinator requested that any proposals be submitted to herself. The Cabinet Forward Work Programme had been included as Appendix 3, the table summarising recent Committee resolutions, advising on progress with their implementation, had been attached as Appendix 4.

The Committee considered its draft Forward Work Programme for future meetings, Appendix 1. The following additions - as requested by the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group – to the Performance Scrutiny Committee agenda on 7 December 2017 were agreed:-

- a) the Welsh Audit Office's national study on Waste Management in Wales and
- b) a report on 'Developing a Highway Maintenance Strategy'.

The Committee were asked to appoint members to the Service Challenge Groups that oversee specific areas of work or services' performance. To that end the following nominations were presented:

- Councillor Ellie Chard - Legal, HR and Democratic Services
- Councillor Hug Irving – Business Improvement and Modernisation.

RESOLVED that

- (i) that, subject to the above observations and amendments, the Forward Work Programme be approved; and***
- (ii) that the appointments to the Service Challenge Groups be agreed.***

9 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

There was no feedback to be presented.

Meeting concluded at 12:00pm