

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT
COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS, POWYS ON
THURSDAY, 9 JUNE 2016**

PRESENT

County Councillor D R Jones (Chair)

County Councillors A W Davies, L R E Davies, E R Davies, MC Mackenzie,
S McNicholas, P J Medlicott, K M Roberts-Jones, G P Vaughan, Mrs A Davies,
Mrs M Evitts and Mrs L Jenkin

Officers: D Morris (Income and Awards Senior Manager), C Davies (Senior Projects
and Transformation Officer), P Higham (Head of Children's Services), L Hocking
(Fostering Team Manager), L Patterson (Scrutiny Officer)

1.	APOLOGIES	PSC16-2015
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No apologies for absence were received.

2.	ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR	PSC17-2015
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**Resolved that County Councillor M. Mackenzie be elected as Vice-Chair for
the ensuing year.**

3.	MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING	PSC18-2015
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The minutes of the meeting of the 17th March 2016 were approved subject to the
amendment to include Mrs Evitts as in attendance.

4.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	PSC19-2015
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No declarations of interest were received.

5.	DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIP	PSC20-2015
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No declarations of party whip were received.

6.	CHAIR'S BRIEFING	PSC21-2015
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The Chair welcomed Members to the first meeting of the Committee since the
Annual Meeting noting that there had been a reduction in County Council
Members on the Committee from 21 to 14. The reduction in size of committees
is a result of the savings that have had to be found within the Members budget.
The calculations regarding political balance has meant that it has only been
possible to appoint 13 Members. This anomaly affects six committees of the
Council and the Head of Democratic Services is arranging a meeting with Group
Leaders to agree appointments to the fourteenth place.

The Chair and Scrutiny Officer had attended a seminar in Birmingham 'Scrutiny
in Challenging Times' and whilst Powys was the only Welsh authority which had
sent representatives it was clear that all authorities were struggling with the same

problems. The particular value of members on scrutiny was their knowledge and experience through their personal circumstances and ward work as users of the services that are under scrutiny.

7.	WELFARE REFORM AND UNIVERSAL CREDIT	PSC22-2015
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The Income and Awards Manager gave a presentation on Welfare Reform and the rollout of Universal Credit (copy filed with signed minutes).

The following questions arose from the presentation:

The IFS figures suggest the poorest families will lose 7% of income or nearly £4,000 per annum (pp 7 and 8 of presentation). Are these figures in accordance with each other?

These figures will be checked.

When the impact of changes is calculated is account taken of families with disabled members (p 8 of presentation)?

The calculations are by household type rather than by benefit claimant.

How many universal credit claimants are there currently in Powys?

Universal Credit has been gradually introduced via job centres starting with job seekers who are single. There are approximately 200 such claimants on universal credit in the county. Full rollout will be done on a job centre by job centre basis and whilst it is not known when individual job centres in Powys will move over to full rollout it is not expected until at least Mid 2017 as it is necessary for Welsh translation of the forms to be completed first.

What confidence is there in the IT system associated with Universal Credit?

It was originally planned for universal credit to have been fully rolled out by 2017 however, problems with IT have meant a different approach has been taken. It is now the case that rollout is taking place on a job centre by job centre basis with all IT problems being resolved before moving onto the next area. However, it is the case that there has been no opportunity to date to test the system with full caseloads. In Powys there are six job centres (Ystradgynlais, Brecon, Llandrindod Wells, Newtown, Machynlleth and Welshpool).

What happens to claimants when the IT fails?

Once a claimant has moved to universal credit it is not possible for previous benefits to be paid (legacy benefits). There have been cases in Wales where there have been delays of up to 12 weeks in payments. At present benefits are being paid around 6-7 days after application.

With regard to those families losing up to £4,000 per year what help is available to help these families adjust?

The service have a contract with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to offer personal budget support. In Powys there have only been about a dozen people who have received this support (from the cohort of single job seekers). It is expected that this service will be in more demand when full rollout takes place. The DWP will increase the funding available for this role as full rollout takes place.

Will claimants suffer hardship as a result of the changes?

It is central government policy to reduce the benefit bill and there will be an impact on claimants. The aim of the service is to try to mitigate the impact and help claimants move over onto universal credit.

Does the increase in free child care from 15 to 30 hours a week apply in Wales?

It was confirmed that this was a change that related to England only.

Mitigation

The service has redesigned the approach to benefit claims by moving to a virtual claims hub with officers able to process claims directly rather than via customer services. It was the requirement to go through customer services which was creating additional work. This has reduced data handling and has resulted in a reduction of days taken to process claims from approximately 30 to 6. It has also improved customer satisfaction and the costs of administration have reduced. The service are undertaking drop in sessions at DWP offices and are exploring the potential to work with the DWP in joint hubs.

Free School Meals (FSM)

The service are continuing to encourage take up of FSM. If a claim is received for a benefit for which an entitlement for FSM would result the FSM claim is made and the claimant is contacted to confirm that this is in order. An annual check is made on eligibility at the end of the year. There is confidence that FSM eligibility resulting from benefit eligibility assessed by the County Council is fully identified. However, there may be claimants eligible for FSM as a result of claims assessed by the DWP (such as tax credits) which the authority would not be able to identify as the DWP and local authority do not share this data.

The service are working with the schools finance service as the rollout of the cashless system occurs to ensure that the pupils dinner money account is credited appropriately.

The service have a Money Advice Team which consists of five officers providing free advice and support. Additionally this team is contracted by Macmillan to provide support for people with cancer. The team is funded partly by the Macmillan contract and partly by the DWP contract. It has been successful in gaining £1.6million in eligible benefits in 2015 and it is expected that this will be over £2million in 2016.

How does this team work in areas which have other advice services?

The team concentrate their work in areas which do not have other advice services.

Cllr Roberts-Jones left the meeting 11.10

The Officers were thanked for their report and it was noted that it would be appropriate to have a further report from the service as roll-out of universal credit commences.

8.	POWYS FOSTERING INSPECTION REPORTS	PSC23-2015
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The Head of Children's Services and Fostering Team Manager presented the CSSIW Powys Fostering Inspection Report April 2016.

The inspection related to the service supporting the 74 full time foster carers although the authority does have other short term / respite carers. This year the team have worked hard to ensure the annual reviews are undertaken with performance for this improving. The inspection report again notes no issues of non-compliance which is pleasing.

How does the team identify which sites to visit for recruitment purposes?

A recruitment plan is put together at the beginning of the year focussing on the areas where the need is greatest. Recruitment is undertaken at locations within the community such as at supermarkets, and talks are given to groups such as the WI. The suggestion that this could be undertaken at groups within schools was noted and it was requested that if Members had suggestions for venues then this would be welcomed.

What is the situation with regard to the vacant principal officer post which has been held in south Powys?

The Head of Service advised that this vacancy had been held whilst a whole service review was being undertaken. The review for the Fostering Service is still taking place. A further vacancy for a social worker post has recently arisen in the north and this is also being held vacant until the review has been completed.

Will the service be able to address this question when the CSSIW undertake their next inspection?

It was confirmed that the CSSIW are kept informed of the progress of the review and by the time of the next inspection the service will be in a position to be able to answer the CSSIW on this point.

When will the review be completed?

The work for the review is complete and the report is being written.

It is a concern that two vacancies are being held vacant. Is this a risk to the service?

The Head of Service stated that whilst one vacancy has been held for sometime the second vacancy is recent. The workload is being managed through existing staff and the service is looking at the level of support which is needed for different carers (eg foster carers/kinship carers) and thus the caseload for each social worker. Social work teams are never at full complement due to leave, sickness absence and training and it is felt that holding the vacancies will not place the authority at risk.

The CSSIW report notes that 'the team manager does not have as much support for their role as needed'. How does this match with the view the service have taken?

The Fostering Manager advised that this referred to her role and she did not feel that this was the case. She was of the opinion that the priority was to have enough social workers rather than having a deputy team manager appointment. She uses other team managers within the service to manage when necessary and is of the opinion that the role is manageable without a deputy.

What is the decrease in budget over the next 2-3 years?

The Head of Service advised that the whole of Children's Services need to find £2.7million. Peopletoo were commissioned to undertake the review and have suggested that the £250k to be found from Fostering Services was in the form of income generation from selling fostering places. This was not an acceptable position for the authority and therefore it is necessary to find these savings from within the service.

Can it be explained why it appears that numbers within the report do not tally?

The service have 90 foster carers of which 74 are full time providing 194 places. However, it may be the case that not all these places are available. For example if a child with complex needs is placed with a foster carer with two places the second place may effectively be unavailable as the first placement would be at risk if a second placement was made. Placement availability has recently been as low as 10 across the county. This can be further restricted by the availability of age appropriate settings so that there may be vacancies for placements of young children whilst the need is for placements for older children.

How many foster carers does the authority have out of county and how many foster carers within Powys are working for other authorities/agencies?

The authority have some foster carers out of county but agencies only have a small number of foster carers in the county. Powys is the principle recruiter of foster carers in county and it is thought that this is because local support can be offered. Whilst the authority pays more to place children with agency foster carers it is the case that the foster carers are paid similar rates to Powys foster carers once the agency fees are deducted.

Does the authority place complex cases through agencies?

It is not always the complexity of a case that would lead to use of agency foster care but rather availability.

Are the number of placements stable?

The numbers of children in foster care are generally stable but the percentage of children placed with Powys foster carers has increased over time.

Does the authority compare placements with other local authorities?

Yes but direct comparisons are not always accurate. For example some authorities operate their own residential homes and may consequently have a different approach to placements than authorities which do not operate their own homes.

Is the payment for foster carers dependent on the needs of the children?

There are two elements relating to foster carer payments. Firstly is an amount which is for the needs of the child, the second relates to the experience of the foster carer. Extra payments are made where a child has complex needs but there are only 3 or 4 of these cases in Powys.

How many LAC of school age are in mainstream school?

The majority of LAC are in mainstream school with a small number in special schools.

What support is available for the birth children of the foster carers?

The service have two support workers who work with children of foster carers. They work with children whilst their parents are applying to be foster cares and continue to support these children before and after placements. The team are developing a handbook for birth children and are setting up a birth children support group.

The Chair welcomed the positive report and thanked the Officers for attending the Committee to give the further information.

9.	MEMBERSHIP OF WORKING GROUPS	PSC24-2015
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Since the Committee had reduced in size a paper had been produced outlining the membership of the working groups which had continued from the membership prior to May 2016.

The Chair outlined changes to the way in which it was intended to undertake scrutiny noting the intention to undertake pre-decision scrutiny on specific items identified by Joint Chairs and the Executive. Some of this pre-decision scrutiny would be appropriately dealt with by existing working groups in particular Education, Adult Social Care and Children's. However, there may be other areas which need consideration which do not fit easily within the above groups. In addition the committee previously had two further groups (Cultural and Corporate matters) which had experienced variable work loads. It was suggested that these two groups combine and pick up any scrutiny reviews from Joint Chairs which do not fall within the other three groups.

Invitations were invited from the committee to join the existing groups and the following requests were made:

Cllr G Vaughan to join the Education Scrutiny Group.

Cllr P Medlicott to join the Cultural/Corporate Matters Scrutiny Group.

Cllr A Davies to join the Health Scrutiny representatives on the Joint Health Scrutiny Group

The Chair explained that there was the opportunity to appoint members to the working groups from outside the membership of People Scrutiny Committee. It was suggested that the Chair first ascertain if absent members of the People Scrutiny Committee were interested in joining working groups and if vacancies on any of the working groups remain then seek expressions of interest to particular groups from the non-executive membership of the Council.

Resolved that People Scrutiny Committee delegate to the Chair of People Scrutiny Committee the authority to seek expressions of interest from members not on People Scrutiny Committee to join working groups and make any such appointments to working groups that are deemed necessary.

10.	ADULT SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY GROUP	PSC25-2015
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Documents considered:

- Progress Report – Scrutiny Officer
- Report to Cabinet – June 2016

It was noted that there was no lead member for this group. The report to Cabinet which was due to be taken on 14th June 2016 however, in the absence of a lead member and with the Chair away this item will now be taken to Cabinet on 5th July 2016.

Outcome:

- That the update be received.

11.	CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY GROUP	PSC26-2015
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Documents considered:

- Progress report – Scrutiny Officer

Outcome:

- That the update be received.

12.	CULTURAL SERVICES SCRUTINY GROUP	PSC27-2015
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Documents considered:

- Progress report – Scrutiny Officer
- Cabinet response to Scrutiny Report on Library Standards

Outcome:

- That the update be received.

13.	EDUCATION SCRUTINY GROUP	PSC28-2015
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Documents considered:

- Progress report – Scrutiny Officer
- Extract of Cabinet minutes -16th April 2016 – Proposed change of age of admission to primary school and Schools Services Asset Management Plan
- Education Scrutiny Report – School Scrutiny Panel. Reported to Cabinet on 24th May 2016
- Outcome letter of ERW Scrutiny Members meeting 11th March 2016.

A response to the Education Scrutiny Report is expected at Cabinet on 5th July 2016.

Outcome:

- That the update be received.

14.	HEALTH SCRUTINY	PSC29-2015
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Documents considered:

- Progress report – Scrutiny Officer
- Outcome letter to Mid Wales Health Care Collaborative from meeting held on 21st March 2016

Outcome:

- That the update be received.

15.	JOINT CHAIRS NOTES	PSC30-2015
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Documents considered:

- Notes of the meetings held on 18th March 2016 and 12th April 2016.

Outcome:

- That the notes are received.

16.	WORK PROGRAMME	PSC31-2015
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It was noted that the work programme would be amended in light of the decisions made at Joint Chairs and would be updated accordingly.

County Councillor D R Jones (Chair)