

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT  
COMMITTEE ROOM A - COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS, POWYS ON  
THURSDAY, 2 MARCH 2017**

**PRESENT**

County Councillor D R Jones (Chair)

County Councillors E R Davies, J Gibson-Watt, S McNicholas, P J Medicott,  
G P Vaughan and Mrs A Davies

In attendance: County Councillors

Officers:

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors L R E Davies,  
K M Roberts-Jones, Mrs M Evitts and Mrs L Jenkin

<b>1.</b>	<b>APOLOGIES</b>	<b>PSC1-2017</b>
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Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor L R E Davies and  
Co-opted Members Mrs M Evitts and Mrs L Jenkin.

<b>2.</b>	<b>MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING</b>	<b>PSC2-2017</b>
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The Chair was authorised to sign the minutes of the meeting held on the 14<sup>th</sup>  
December 2017.

<b>3.</b>	<b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b>	<b>PSC3-2017</b>
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No declarations of interest were received.

<b>4.</b>	<b>DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIP</b>	<b>PSC4-2017</b>
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No declarations of party whip were received.

<b>5.</b>	<b>SCHOOLS CASHLESS SYSTEM</b>	<b>PSC5-2017</b>
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The Business Services Programme Delivery Manager gave a presentation on the progress of implementation of the Schools Cashless System (copy filed with signed minutes).

The project introduces cashless payment in all schools to include school meals, trips and other parental payments such as uniform, sports kit and proms. It aims to improve risk avoidance (by not having to handle cash), service improvement for parents and pupils and efficiencies (cashier posts are being deleted from those primary schools where this has been brought in). There has been an increase in the uptake of both paid and free school meals.

The project has been funded from the capital budget and the Commercial Services department of the Council procured the two systems which were required (Nationwide Retail Systems for the hardware needed in schools and the online Parent Pay system which enables parents to pay for pupils meals).

The system was piloted in Crickhowell catchment which included a large high school and four primary schools including both large and small primary schools. The pilot demonstrated that the biggest benefits were to be found in the secondary sector (in terms of take up of paid and free school meals) and on this basis Project Board made a decision to rollout to all secondary schools first.

The system is now live in 15 schools (10 secondary and 5 primary). The two remaining secondary schools to go live are Llanfyllin (9<sup>th</sup> March) and Bro Hyddgen (13<sup>th</sup> March). There was a delay before the system could be rolled out to some schools in the north as it required translation. This was completed on the 1<sup>st</sup> March and the system is now fully bilingual.

The co-operation and support from all schools has been outstanding.

It has been calculated that there has been an increase in take up of free school meals between 2017-18 of 8% as per indicative figures in the PLASC return. It is not possible to conclude that this is solely due to the introduction of the cashless system but it appears that by removing any stigma of claiming free school meals there may have been an increase in take up.

The next phase will be the rollout to all primary schools which will be done by catchment areas in the same order that high schools were rolled out subject to ongoing scrutiny by Project Board. Members will be written to with this programme so that they are aware when this will take place in their community.

A further phase is planned in the future where the opportunities to use the system for other school based activities such as attendance or home to school transport would be explored.

*How was it possible for bilingual schools in south Powys to introduce the cashless system before it had been translated?*

The schools were given an opportunity to introduce it in English only or wait until it had been translated. Now that the system has been translated all schools have the opportunity to use it in either language.

*How has the increased uptake of free school meals been calculated? A Headteacher in one of the High Schools has recently said she has not observed an increase in uptake of free school meals.*

This information has been recently calculated and has not yet been shared with Headteachers but will be shared shortly.

*What is the position regarding debt that can be accrued using this system?*

Debt is an issue that the team are aware of. It has been decided that a zero tolerance to debt will be the position however, it will be at the discretion of individual staff to implement. For example, staff are aware of those pupils who rarely go into debt and where this debt will be immediately cleared where they may decide to allow a small debt to accrue. A different approach may be taken to those pupils who repeatedly try to purchase meals having run up a considerable level of debt. In this case further purchases will not be permitted. The zero tolerance approach was introduced on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2017 and since then a reduction in debt has been observed. Outstanding debts are actively pursued.

*How is it possible for debt to be run up?*

Previously there was no limit set on the debt that could be accrued. The project board considered a debt limit of £5 per pupil but at present have decided that a zero tolerance approach will be taken but no debt limit on the account which will allow the discretion described above.

*What are the options for those parents who are not online?*

If parents do not have online access they may request a Paypoint card which allows them to top up the account at various places in the community. Some parents choose this option rather than the online option and some high schools have up to 30 families choosing this option. It is also possible to use a smart phone to access Parentpay. In some schools computer terminals have been placed in reception for parents to be able to use to access this service.

*How are new pupils registered for the system? Does the information transfer from primary to secondary pupils?*

The initial registration of pupils was undertaken by a central team who also trained catering staff to undertake registrations and who will undertake all future registrations.

Primary pupils are registered through photo recognition whilst secondary pupils are registered through biometrics (thumb prints) and therefore pupils need to re-register when they move to secondary school. Schools are arranging for this re-registration to take place during the induction period.

Members thanked the Business Services Programme Delivery Manager for her presentation and noted the success of the project to date and hoped that the remaining rollout would proceed smoothly.

6.	HEAD OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES	PSC6-2017
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The Head of Children's Services was invited to give an overview of the work of her department. She explained that she had taken up the role in late September 2016 taking over from the Interim Head of Children's Services who had been in role approximately two months.

Children's Services covers the following areas:

- Child Protection
- Looked After Children
- Care Leavers
- Early help (support to try and avoid the need for intervention such as Flying Start and Families First)
- Youth Justice
- Bannau/Camlas residential unit
- Fostering and adoption
- Supported lodgings
- Safeguarding
- Independent reviewing officers
- Children and Young Peoples Partnership

*How many children are currently Looked After?*

At present there are 160 which is the higher than the previous level of around 145 (at around this level for the last three years). This equates to approximately 59 per 10,000 population which compares well with Wales (80/10,000) and England (60/10,000). There has been an increase in Looked After Children since the death of Baby P in 2007. The Head of Children's Services explained that she was seeking information regarding the length of time that children who become looked after are known to the service to ascertain if more could have been done earlier to prevent them becoming looked after.

*Why are children taken into care?*

This data is not currently easily accessible but it tends to be due to neglect rather than physical or sexual abuse. Research is being undertaken to ascertain if action is taken too late including discussions with CAFCASS. The service are examining the possibility of creating an edge of care service to support those children at risk of being taken into care.

In the last quarter more under 5s were taken into care whereas in quarters 1 and 2 were mostly older children. This will continue to be monitored.

It appears that Powys have more Child Protection cases than regional partners. All regional partners are working to the same criteria and therefore the reasons for this difference are being examined.

*What are the new safeguarding reporting arrangements?*

The new reporting will be introduced in quarter 4. It will enable data to be comparable and therefore it will be possible to understand where Powys is similar or different to other authorities.

*How is the Corporate Parenting Group working currently?*

The Head of Children's Services advised that she was implementing changes to the way this group worked to improve the opportunity for the voice of children and young people to be heard. Residential provision for young people with

specific needs is being examined by this group including capacity at Bannau/Camlas.

*Is there a connection between the children of care leavers becoming looked after?*

The Head of Children's Services explained that this was being investigated. The service are looking to see if any of the people that they are working with would benefit from working with PAUSE which is a programme to provide support to women who have had children repeatedly taken into care to try to break this cycle. In some authorities parent groups are set up to support parents who have had children taken into care. It is necessary to act in the timeframe of the child rather than the parent.

The Head of Children's Services explained that the service were experiencing financial challenges. The budgeting for Looked After Children was particularly problematic as giving a budget at the beginning of the year meant the potential for an overspend was real if numbers rose. Some other authorities calculated the budget from the year end and the possibility of this should be explored.

The service are looking at out of county placements and investigating if it is right, proper, safe and what the child wants to be brought back to live closer to their carers. This can take a lot of work but can be successful.

Work is being undertaken regarding the capacity at Bannau/Camlas

7.	<b>CHAIR'S BRIEFING</b>	<b>PSC7-2017</b>
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Chair's Briefing matters were discussed under Updates from Working Groups.

8.	<b>ADULT SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY GROUP</b>	<b>PSC8-2017</b>
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The Scrutiny Officer explained that the current system of undertaking pre-Cabinet scrutiny had been in place for the last three months. Some early difficulties had been experienced getting hold of Cabinet reports in time for the scrutiny process to have a meaningful opportunity to comment. Another difficulty scrutiny were experiencing was an incomplete Cabinet work programme which was making the early identification of potential items for scrutiny problematic. It is understood that Cabinet and Management Team are aware of these problems and steps are being taken to address these issues.

**Documents considered:**

- Progress report

The work programme for this group would be driven by instruction from Joint Chairs but was known to include:

- Older Person's Accommodation

- Future Domiciliary Care Commissioning intentions

<b>9.</b>	<b>ADULT SOCIAL CARE - AUDIT SCRUTINY GROUP</b>	<b>PSC9-2017</b>
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The Chair advised that this paper had been taken to Cabinet on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2017. He expressed disappointment that the Portfolio Holder had not been more receptive to the findings of the scrutiny group. At the Cabinet meeting the Leader indicated that a formal cabinet response to the report would be provided.

<b>10.</b>	<b>EDUCATION SCRUTINY GROUP</b>	<b>PSC10-2017</b>
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**Documents considered:**

- Progress report – Scrutiny Officer

County Councillors D Jones and S McNichoas had attended a meeting of the ERW Joint Scrutiny Group on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 2017. The following matters were noted:

- it was the responsibility of the local scrutiny committees to seek assurance from their Portfolio Holder regarding the performance management of challenge advisors;
- that it was good practice for individual school scrutiny panels to invite high performing schools as well as struggling schools to a scrutiny panel meeting,
- the ERW business plan would be coming to individual cabinets imminently
- that deficit school budgets in other authorities do not appear to be allowed to reach the levels that are evidenced in the case of Brecon High School and Ysgol Cedewain.

The Lead Member advised that a report had gone to Cabinet on the Brecon High School deficit earlier this week. The Cabinet discussion appeared to acknowledge that a wrong decision in respect of school reorganisation at Brecon/Gwernfyfed might have been made. The Cabinet decision in respect of this item will be published imminently. The joint Audit / Education Scrutiny Group will continue to monitor this matter.

<b>11.</b>	<b>HEALTH SCRUTINY</b>	<b>PSC11-2017</b>
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**Documents considered:**

- Progress report – Scrutiny Officer

**Outcome:**

- That the report be received

<b>12.</b>	<b>JOINT CHAIRS NOTES</b>	<b>PSC12-2017</b>
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**Documents considered:**

- Notes of the meeting held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2016 and 17<sup>th</sup> January 2017.

**Outcome:**

- That the notes be received.

<b>13.</b>	<b>WORK PROGRAMME</b>	<b>PSC13-2017</b>
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The work programme was received.

The Chair noted that this was the last meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee before the elections in May and thanked all Members of the Committee and the Scrutiny Officer for the work they had undertaken over the last five years.

**County Councillor D R Jones (Chair)**