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Scrutiny Committee B
Wednesday, 14 June 2017

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE B HELD AT COMMITTEE ROOM A - COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS, POWYS ON WEDNESDAY, 14 JUNE 2017

PRESENT

County Councillor P Roberts (Chair)

County Councillors G Breeze, B Davies, H Hulme, D R Jones, F H Jump,
S McNicholas, L Roberts, E Roderick, D Rowlands, R G Thomas,
Parent Governor Representatives: N Bufton, Mrs A Davies and S Davies
Church Representative Mrs M Evitts

In attendance

Portfolio Holders M Alexander (Education) and P Davies (Property and Waste)

1. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED that County Councillor David Jones be elected as Vice-Chair for the ensuing year.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors A Jenner and M Mackenzie and from Portfolio Holder R Powell.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

4. DISCLOSURE OF PARTY WHIPS

No disclosures of Party Whips was received.

5. INTRODUCTORY BRIEFINGS

Culture, Leisure, Countryside and Youth Services

The Portfolio Holder for Property and Waste introduced himself explaining that his portfolio included archives and sustainability which was covered by Scrutiny Committee B. He confirmed that he wished to work with scrutiny on common areas of interest.

The Head of Leisure and Recreation gave an overview of his service which covers the following areas:

Libraries

Over the last year the service have been in discussion regarding branch libraries and potential joint arrangements. The service had been given an efficiency target to meet and had been given a further year to negotiate with communities before the savings were required. Scrutiny may wish to consider the work done with communities which has been progressive and attracted the interest of the Minister.

The Library service is much more than a book lending service and in some locations provides a face to face opportunity for the public to access Powys services known as Library Plus.

The Library Service also produce an Annual Report on Standards which has previously been considered by scrutiny and Cabinet prior to forwarding on to the Welsh Government.

Sports Development

This team is largely grant funded from Sports Wales (approx. £500k Grant) and includes of a team based in schools. The focus for sports development is moving beyond grassroots and elite sports towards an active population.

Leisure and Sports Centres

The Council are 2 years into a 15 year contract with Freedom Leisure. There are very substantial contractual obligations on both sides. The Scrutiny Chair is invited to attend quarterly meetings with Freedom Leisure as a Scrutiny observer. In addition there are monthly meetings at a service level between officers and Freedom Leisure. The service are encouraging Freedom Leisure to work closely with Powys Teaching Health Board and the Children's and Young Peoples Partnership.

There is currently a review of provision at Llanfair Caereinion and Staylittie which will be brought back to Cabinet in the autumn.

Arts Service

This service consists of one officer whose role includes the management of a Service Level agreement contract with Powys' Theatres and Powys Dance. There is a small level of support for music development and the officer sources and disseminates grants.

Outdoor Recreation

Some Powys towns have substantial areas of open recreational land (eg Newtown, Brecon and Llandrindod Wells), there are approximately 60 play areas, plus rugby and football pitches that the Council are responsible for. This is another area where community development is being explored, with bowling greens and cricket pitches having been transferred to community groups.

Countryside Service

This area covers registration of common land and village greens, plus management of the public rights of way network (including a service level agreement with Brecon Beacons National Park) with, at 6,500 miles of path, the highest mileage of any UK authority and access land with the largest area in England and Wales. Access land in Powys covers about a third of all access land in Wales.

Museums, Archives and Modern Records

The archive service is about to move into a new building after concern from regulators that the previous accommodation was unsuitable to the extent that the archive was at risk of removal from the authority. The new building provides

double the amount of space for the Council's own paper-based records plus a fit-for-purpose public archives..

Youth Service

At present the service operate from 5 hubs and there is a Youth Worker in each High School. The service have recently received a formal offer of a European Grant under the Social Fund to support young people at the risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

Catering

All schools (except Llanfyllin High School) have catering provided by the authority. A Cashless System is being rolled out with a side benefit that eligible for free school meals is completely anonymous. The service also runs staff canteens in Llandrindod Wells and Brecon County Buildings and is in discussion with Adult Social Care regarding catering in some Day Centres.

Cleaning

This is provided internally to authority buildings and undertakes to audit external contracts run by a number of schools. are sought. The service also receive and deliver unwanted good quality furniture which is reused by Housing and Social Care.

With regard to the Cashless System is this now available across Powys?

This is being rolled out as quickly as the service have the capacity to install it. Consideration is being given as to whether some schools are too small to make installation cost effective. Consideration is also given to cases schools are formally subject to changes under school modernisation.

Not all correspondence regarding the cashless system has been provided bilingually.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the system would be provided fully bilingually by September. It has reached some schools already.

How are items identified for scrutiny?

The Head of Democratic Services advised that potential items for scrutiny are assessed at the meeting of Joint Chairs and Vice-Chairs based on the Cabinet forward work programme.

What is happening in Brecon?

The Brecon Cultural Hub is due for consideration at Scrutiny Committee A on the 15th June 2017.

What joint working projects are ongoing?

The Head of Leisure and Recreation advised that work had progressed regarding a joint library and museum in Llanidloes and other projects are being pursued where it is reasonable to do so for example the potential of joint working with Ystradgynlais Job Centre. The main focus of work however is with Town Councils.

Is it true that the funding for Young Farmers is being reduced by 50%?

The funding will be cut by 50% however, the timescale for this reduction has been delayed by one year and there will be a staggered reduction to allow for a period of adjustment.

What are the proposals for the Youth Service?

This will be brought forward in due course. It is necessary to save a further £220k in 2018-19 (leading to an overall budget reduction of reduction of 50%) and the service are at present identifying options as to how this might be achieved.

How was the new archives building funded?

This was funded via the Capital Programme.

Education

The Senior Manager Schools Transformation gave the following presentation:

There have been a number of changes in the Education Service recently with the Head of Schools moving to Wrexham and a new Director of Education due to start in July. The Acting Head of Schools apologised as he was unable to attend scrutiny today.

Powys have: 11 Secondary School
1 All through School (4-18)
11 Sixth Forms
3 Special Schools
1 PRU (on 2 sites in Brecon and Newtown)
84 Primary Schools

51 Schools have less than 100 pupils of which 19 Schools have less than 50 pupils.

There are 7,500 pupils in Secondary Schools, 10,300 pupils in Primary Schools and 300 pupils in Special Schools.

Pupil numbers have been decreasing but are starting to rise again.

Standards will be brought to scrutiny during the year. There is a varied picture and the authority is on an improvement journey. In the National Categorisation of Schools there have been an increase in the number of school in the top band and a reduction in schools in the bottom band but there is still work to be done.

The following challenges face the Schools Service:

- Falling school rolls has impacted on schools (staffing, curriculum offer etc)
- Financial challenges (School budgets will come to scrutiny)
- Welsh Medium provision – there are 600 learners in the secondary sector across twelve schools
- SEN provision with the new legislation which gives a role for the authority until the pupil is 25
- Leadership in rural schools
- Investment in infrastructure – at present there is an £80million investment programme to 2019 joint funded at 50% by Welsh Government

- Post 16 provision – at present NPTC operate from Brecon and Newtown. There has been a significant decrease in funding for Post 16 provision and there are other providers across the border who are proving attractive to Powys learners

The Schools Service Improvement Plan has four main areas including:

- School Improvement
- ALN
- School Modernisation
- School Infrastructure

The Portfolio Holder gave the following presentation:

Scrutiny is a key partner in overcoming challenges. This is an exciting time and we now have a Minister who understands the issues facing rural schools. Schools rolls have plateaued and in all but two areas numbers are now increasing. The Cabinet will shortly issue a direction of travel. She has six children who have all been through the Powys education system during school transformation and can say that transformation has not impacted on them despite shaking communities. The authority cannot afford anymore grand transformation schemes which cost time, money and credibility.

It is intended to transform the way schools work together by radical co-operation both within Powys and cross-border. There are huge opportunities for using new technologies. She is aware that some learners who have gone to out of county sixth forms have returned to Powys appreciating what Powys schools offered. It is hoped that in five years' time school staff will be of the opinion that Powys is the best place to work.

A paper on school budgets will be brought to scrutiny. The Portfolio Holder is a School Governor and knows how hard it is from that perspective. She observed that two of the smallest Secondary Schools have a surplus budget whilst two of the largest schools have large budget deficits. This would suggest that closing small schools and sending pupils to larger schools is not necessarily the answer.

There is a need to improve Governor Training and look to undertake more peer to peer support.

In respect of Post 16 education the authority want to provide choice but it is the case that the best universities only accept 15 subjects so whilst pupils need to have choice this should be informed choice. The authority need to work closely with FE providers including Hereford and Shrewsbury. There are opportunities to deliver jointly with other providers using technology which would mean small numbers would no longer be a barrier.

What is your view on Welsh Language education as it can have an impact on a schools budget?

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that support for bilingual education would be an early subject for consideration. It is acknowledged that offering more subjects through the medium of Welsh comes at a cost and that there are limitations.

How is the Portfolio Holder intending to address the current crisis in school budgets?

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that whilst some Secondary Schools (eg Ysgol Caereinion) were in budget crisis there were a number of schools with a surplus balance including Llanidloes High School and Gwernyfed High School. The intention to move pupils from a school with a surplus budget to a school with a deficit budget does not necessarily mean the school with a deficit budget will be in a better position. It may be the case that schools with a deficit budget need to undertake a restructure as they may still be operating on a structure which was in place when the school roll was far higher. If the Schools Service are undertaking less revolutionary change and more evolutionary change there should be additional capacity to support schools with budget issues.

Is school modernisation on the backburner?

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that 'old style' modernisation would not be pursued and that the new style of working with communities would mean that more schools could be transformed.

Both Ystradynlais and Welshpool High School are unable to set balanced budgets and despite support simply need more money. When will the Fair Funding Formula be reviewed?

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that it would be necessary to review the Fair Funding Formula as it had to be acknowledged that in order to keep schools in rural areas then these schools will be more expensive. The alternative is to fund town schools properly and rural schools not at all. This is an area of work scrutiny could examine.

The Senior Manager confirmed that the authority had recently received a Rural Schools Grant of £250k. The definition of small schools was interesting as even the town schools have large rural catchments. Schools have been invited to apply for this funding and this will be allocated by the end of the summer term. It is expected that the Rural School Grant will continue.

Why can even large new schools not attract applicants from out of county?

The Senior Manager confirmed that despite national adverts these posts had not attracted many applicants which was surprising.

The Portfolio Holder suggested linking with Teacher Training providers in Bangor and Aberystwyth many help improve the number of applicants interested in Powys.

What is the position with regard to Welsh Language education at Brecon High School?

The Senior Manager advised that the Objection Report would go to Cabinet on 4th July for final consideration.

The Portfolio Holder advised that five Members of Cabinet had been to speak to parents the previous night and the decision would be between a wide range of subject choices and a bus journey or fewer subjects provided locally.

Scrutiny should examine the proposals for Welsh Medium at Brecon High School.

The Head of Democratic Services explained that proposals regarding school modernisation were considered at County Council prior to decision at Cabinet. Scrutiny was involved at the stage of setting the policy but not in regard to

individual proposals as all Members had an opportunity for involvement at Full Council. There would be a further opportunity for local Members to speak at the Cabinet meeting on 4th July.

The Portfolio Holder advised that it was intended to produce a new Welsh Medium policy which scrutiny would have an opportunity to consider.

How can the authority be assured that pupils are registered when they access courses on split sites?

The authority has purchased a new system from Gwynedd which will be rolled out through the summer for implementation in September. This ensures that pupils are registered at their base school and if they are absent then transport arrangements can be cancelled.

How many schools have submitted a balanced budget plans by the 1st May as required by the Scheme for Financing Schools?

The Portfolio Holder advised that 65% of Primary Schools and 50% of Secondary Schools had submitted plans and it was expected that the remaining schools would submit plans shortly.

It was noted that this was now six weeks beyond the deadline and that scrutiny would be examining this at their meeting in July.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed there was no intention of allowing schools to run deficit budgets year on year. Some small schools can balance budgets whilst those larger schools with Bursars are unable to. It will be necessary to ascertain the reason for this.

What work is being undertaken by the service to ensure new builds are energy efficient?

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that new builds are built as close as possible to passive house standards. The potential to borrow to invest for solar panels on schools could be considered to help offset school budget deficits. The Portfolio Holder also expressed concern regarding the effect of bussing pupils long distances.

This may be an item of interest for scrutiny.

Welsh Language

The Welsh Language Officer gave the following presentation. He advised that the Welsh Language Officers were responsible for supporting the Council to work through the medium of Welsh.

There are 24,000 Welsh speakers in Powys across the whole of the county, representing 1 in 5 of the population, although some areas have a higher percentage than others. There is a high percentage of young people who speak Welsh.

The Welsh Language Measure of 2011 set out how organisations must work through the medium of Welsh and how the language should not be treated less favourably. A Welsh Language Commission has been created to promote and improve the opportunities to use Welsh in everyday life and Welsh Language Standards have been set for the authority to implement.

For Powys County Council there are 167 standards ranging from simple to complex to adhere to, covering the following areas:

- Service delivery standards (covering interactions with the public)
- Policy making standards (assessing the impact of policies on the Welsh Language)
- Promotion standards
- Operational standards (facilitating the use of Welsh internally within the Council)
- Record keeping standards

The Council must produce a 5 year strategy for promoting the Welsh Language with a target for increasing the number of Welsh speakers.

There is a legal duty to comply with the Standards and failure to do so could lead to a complaint which, if upheld, could lead to a fine of £5,000 for each breach of a Standard.

More than Just Words is the Welsh Government's strategic framework for the Welsh language in health and social care with a focus on the 'Active Offer', which is offering a Welsh language service to those people who would want to receive it without expecting them to have to ask for it. Powys is taking the approach of matching language needs of clients with language ability of social workers.

The Welsh Language Support and Challenge Group works to ensure the implementation and monitoring of the More than Just Words framework.

Of the people who are defined as speaking Welsh is it known what level their language skills are?

Not with regard to the public but the Council does record the language skill levels of its employees.

The longstanding approach in education of predominately English medium provision has led to a decline in the amount of Welsh speakers in the community over three generations from 90% to 10-20%. To reverse this will need primary schools to become bilingual and equal investment in both languages. Patience will be needed as it will take some time to reverse the decline.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that actions need to be carried out and not just talked about to enable children to have the same provision in both languages.

This will be a challenge as there is now a cohort of pupils who are learning Welsh but whose parents do not speak the language and whilst pupils access Welsh medium provision in primary school it often stops there.

The Portfolio Holder advised that she had been able to expand the use of the Welsh Language in Young Farmers Clubs.

What will these proposals cost?

The Welsh Language Officer confirmed that it supports departments to provide services in Welsh but the costs of these are provided from individual departmental budgets. It is important when developing new policies that language is considered from the start and that it is not considered as a 'bolt on' which would cost more.

Cllr S McNicholas and Mrs M Evitts left 13.05

Children's Services

The service covers two distinct areas including multi-agency working and early intervention and prevention.

It is largely driven by the requirements of the Social Services and Well-being Act, the Well-being and Future Generations Act and recent legislation on Domestic Violence.

The service work with health, education and social care and aim for a holistic approach.

The multi-agency work includes:

- Families first
- Team around the family (TAF) – 600 staff from health, education and social care trained to work with families providing support tailored to individual situations
- Youth Offending Service (YIS)
- Action for Children
- Counselling (school based and online)
- Healthy activities

A population and wellbeing assessment has been undertaken and a plan will be produced from these findings.

From an operational perspective the authority is moving to a locality model for providing children's services. The focus is on care and support and whilst there are challenges the service is also looking at opportunities. The Social Services and Well-being Act focuses on 'What Matters' and this approach has been integrated.

Children's Services are responsible for Looked After Children (LAC) and information on this service is reported to the Corporate Parenting Group. There are currently 183 LAC the numbers of which have spiked over the last 7-8 months (the figure has been around 150 for some time) and this spike is reflected across Wales. The support provided to LAC can be at a high level and thus high cost. There are currently 108 children on the Child Protection register. This has increased over the last 5 years from a previously stable figure of 80-90.

Children's Services are concerned with children's safeguarding noting that this is 'everybody's business' and Youth Justice. The service is also responsible for children with disabilities together with a local fostering service and involvement with a national adoption service.

Over the next three years the priorities are:

- Better integration
- Early intervention and prevention (which needs to be resourced appropriately)
- Cultural transformation in respect of recent legislation

- Improvement of Powys People Direct (PPD)
- Find savings of £2.2 million

Why are LAC numbers increasing?

There are a number of reasons including a spike in the number of sibling groups and more recently an increase in the number of babies becoming LAC.

With regard to families accessing TAF are there many instances of re-referrals?

The TAF in Powys was originally set up with 12 weeks of support for families but national guidelines suggest that better outcomes are achieved with 6 months of support thus some re-referrals may have arisen due to closing cases too early. Additionally re-referrals may result where the issues a family face at original referral have been resolved but new issues are identified which require additional support. At present there are 311 families on the TAF programme.

What work is being undertaken to improve Powys People Direct (PPD)?

There had been a challenge in getting a Manager to cover both adults and children's services but the service now have a permanent manager. The Social Services and Well-being Act clearly defines what is required in PPD which will help strengthen the service.

What is the biggest issues affecting children in Powys?

There are often multiple issues that affect children and many of these can be issues that affect their parents. A holistic approach is needed.

The meeting broke for lunch at 13.30 and reconvened at 14.00 with the following Members in attendance:

Councillor P Roberts (Chair),
Councillors G Breeze, B Davies, H Hulme, D Jones, E Roderick, D Rowlands,
Parent Governor Representatives: A Davies and S Davies

6. ACRF - DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT
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The Strategic Commissioning and Project Manager introduced the Directors Report explaining the process which was outlined in the papers. The Directors Report goes through a series of challenges and having being considered at Scrutiny Committee A and B would be going to Cabinet then Council.

In previous years scrutiny and audit members have had an opportunity to consider the evidence for the report at a Challenge Day. This was not held this year. What will the process be in future years?

It was felt that the Challenge Day was a useful process when the service did not have such robust governance processes. It was felt that the evidence grids replicated the Service Improvement Plan which had already been subject to scrutiny at Project and Programme boards. The Challenge Day was not a formal requirement of the process and it was decided to share the Heads of Services statements with scrutiny. Unfortunately this coincided with the election and it was not possible for Members to look at these in detail this year.

The comments regarding Powys People Direct do not seem to accurately reflect the position as observed by scrutiny. The abandoned call rates are mentioned but there is no figures relating to their improvement.

The service acknowledge that whilst improvements have been made there is still some way to go with PPD. The abandoned call rates will be included.

Whilst percentage rates are included for many of the figures it is not clear what size of cohort they relate to and therefore the scale or otherwise of an issue. Can these be included?

The service confirmed that the percentage figures come from a national survey of all the children who had be involved with Children's Services for three months or more. This is the first time this survey has been undertaken and will now be undertaken annually. From next year it will be possible to compare Powys' performance with other authorities and look at trends within the authority.

When the Heads of Service statements were sent to Members a query was raised asking why there was no mention of the Strategic Review of the Bannau/Camlas residential units which was noted as an Improvement Objective in last year's report. This should be included in this year's report.

The service are still examining how to generate income from the respite centres at Bannau/Camlas and will reference this work in the Directors Report.

The new format means it is difficult to work out which part of the report relates to Children's and which to Adults. Can further thought be given to how this can be made easier at the early stages.

This will be looked at for the report next year.

The report will now go to Cabinet on 11th July and County Council on 13th July. It will then be published by the end of July.

7. APPOINTMENT TO WORKING GROUPS

The Chair invited all Members to express an interest for the working groups and include their interests and experience. These would be collated and membership confirmed in due course.

Meeting closed 14.45

P Roberts
County Councillor

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