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Scrutiny Committee B Friday, 26 January 2018

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE B HELD AT COMMITTEE ROOM B - COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS, POWYS ON FRIDAY, 26 JANUARY 2018

PRESENT

County Councillor P Roberts (Chair)

County Councillors J Gibson-Watt, B Davies, D R Jones, S McNicholas, L Roberts,
E Roderick, D Rowlands, R G Thomas,
Parent Governor Representatives N. Bufton, Mrs A Davies and Mrs S. Davies
Church Representative Mrs M Evitts

I Budd (Director of Education), M Evans (Senior Manager Schools Transformation), S
Astley (Schools Transformation and Welsh Medium Education Programme Manager)
and E Patterson (Scrutiny Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors G Breeze, H
Hulme, A Jenner and K Laurie-Parry.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

3. DISCLOSURE OF PARTY WHIPS

No disclosures of Party Whips were received.

4. MINUTES

The Chair was authorised to sign the minutes of the meeting held on the 12th
October 2017 as a true record.

5. CHAIR'S BRIEFING

The Chair advised that most of the work that had been undertaken had been
outlined in the update reports. A number of joint scrutiny sessions were now
being held and whilst there was still some way to go it was his view that scrutiny
were starting to make an impact within the authority. Scrutiny will become all the
more important now that the Shire Committees have been abolished which has
removed the opportunity to question Portfolio Holders and senior officers in this
arena.

6. SCRUTINY OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD

The Committee were asked to appoint a representative to the Public Services
Board Scrutiny Committee together with a substitute representative.

Outcome:

- **County Councillor D R Jones be appointed as the Committee's representative on the PSB Scrutiny Committee, with County Councillor P Roberts as the substitute representative**

7. CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY GROUP

Youth Services

At the Full Council meeting on the 25th January 2018 a Notice of Motion regarding Youth Services had been considered.

Scrutiny Members reported concern at Full Council that the changes agreed at Cabinet in November 2017 would be detrimental to the provision of quality youth services. The proposals had been scrutinised in October 2017. Part of the Council resolution includes:

'the Cabinet review the quality and accessibility of Youth Services for people with protected characteristics and in poorer communities throughout Powys within 12 months of the date of closure'.

Recommended that:

scrutiny should request sight of this 12 month review and in order to be able to consider this that scrutiny should contact the Portfolio Holder and Head of Service asking for the performance indicators that are being monitored to ensure that there is a baseline from which the impact of the changes can be monitored.

That this monitoring be undertaken by the Leisure/Culture Scrutiny Group to share the workload but that any members of Children's or Education Scrutiny who wished to take part were welcome to join this group for this item.

Lead Member

Cllr Rowlands advised that he had written to the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services with recommendations from the session on Safeguarding in November and was awaiting a response. Cllr Jones confirmed that he had written jointly to the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services and Adults Services with the Lead Member for Adult Scrutiny regarding the session on Powys People Direct on 15th January. A reply was awaited.

Scrutiny Members noted that to date there had been a focus on undertaking scrutiny by way of speaking to Officers. It was necessary to seek information from other sources to get information from service users. The sensitive and confidential nature of Children's Scrutiny meant that this will need to be sought with care.

8. EDUCATION SCRUTINY GROUP

The update from the Education Scrutiny Group was received. The Lead Member noted concerns regarding the transition between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 (where pupils moved from primary school to high school).

Recommended that primary to high school transition be considered at Joint Chairs for inclusion on the work programme.

The outcome of the request to Joint Chairs for Monitoring of the Change of Age of Admission was noted as: 'to be added to the scrutiny work programme as a low priority'.

The Chair asked for an update on Schools Budgets.

The Portfolio Holder advised that the timescales for the budget process had been brought forward which has an impact on the savings. The authority wants to provide timely advice and a Voluntary Severance Scheme in place for which 24 primaries, 2 special and all the high schools are signed up to. There are currently two high schools that are non-compliant and both schools are working well to come to an accommodation.

The Director of Education advised that this year the funding from Welsh Government had been less than a flat line with costs rising (for example there will be an increase in superannuation costs in 2019/20). The Funding Formula is not all wrong. It is complicated and protects falling rolls but does not acknowledge rising rolls. There has been a significant decrease in secondary school rolls since 2010. A number of High schools have not made adjustments in a timely manner. This has not been helped by the authority not having enough information and/or not taking timely action. This has been tightened up. The service has shared information as soon as it has become available but in some cases the authority has yet to receive the information (for example the Education Improvement Grant has not been confirmed but schools have been advised it is expected to decrease by 11%). The service are trying to protect school by keeping central retentions to a minimum. Post 16 allocations have also not yet been received which is much later than usual.

The Funding Formula review will provide clarity and simplification of the formula so that it is not only easier to administer but can be circulated to schools so they can check their allocations.

In the case of two schools the authority is moving from support to compliance. In addition the new Mid Wales High School whilst having a balanced plan for Year 1 is projecting a deficit for Years 2 and 3 which is being worked on to ensure a sustainable offer and structure is in place.

Whilst it is accepted that only two schools are non-compliant can figures be produced regarding those schools showing unlicensed deficits.

It was confirmed that this would be provided.

What are licensed/unlicensed budgets?

There is no right to a deficit and for those schools which are in breach of the Scheme for Financing Schools will be in an unlicensed position. For the Local Authority to license a deficit it will have to have done due diligence that there is a plan to pay back the deficit. The Local Authority is unable to license more deficits than can be covered by reserves. There is one school in Powys with a deficit of such size that it will be necessary to in the first place balance costs against income.

Earlier this year Members were advised that action would be taken to address this.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that procedures were still being followed but if the directions issued were not complied with further action would follow which could include:

- Withdraw delegation
- Direct a change in the Chair of the Governing Body
- Add extra Governors to the Governing Body
- Request the Cabinet Secretary to implement an Interim Executive Board to replace the Governing Body.

Scrutiny endorse the compliance action in process to ensure that other schools do not end up in a similar position.

A presentation will be provided to the Lead Member who can consider it for inclusion in the work programme.

Information regarding those schools with unlicensed deficits to be provided.

9.	LEISURE/CULTURE SCRUTINY GROUP
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The update from the Lead Member for the Leisure/Culture Scrutiny Group was received.

10.	WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN
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The Senior Manager Schools Transformation gave a presentation (copy filed with signed minutes).

At present in Powys there are 11 Welsh medium primary schools, 10 dual stream primary schools and 6 dual stream secondary schools.

In 2010 Welsh Government produced a Welsh Medium Education Strategy with a requirement for local authorities to produce a Welsh Education Strategic Plan. In 2013 the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 provides the legal background for the production of the WESP. Welsh Ministers can approve the plan, approve the plan with modifications or reject the proposed plan and prepare a plan which will become the local authority's WESP.

In 2017 Welsh Government produced the Cymraeg 2050 Strategy with an aim to achieve 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050.

A WESP was agreed for the period 2014-17 and the authority recently approved an updated version for 2017-2020 which includes the following objectives:

- **Objective 1:** To increase the opportunities for pupils to access Welsh-medium early years provision
- **Objective 2:** To establish, and identify opportunities to establish, new designated Welsh-medium provision in the primary sector
- **Objective 3:** To provide equitable and sustainable linguistic progression for Welsh-medium pupils from Key Stage 2 into Key Stage 3, 4 and 5
- **Objective 4:** To provide improved opportunities for latecomers to transfer to the Welsh-medium sector in all stages of education

The WESP was submitted to Welsh Government who made comments regarding the focus. This has been addressed and the plan will be monitored by Welsh Government on a termly basis.

One of the outcomes is for more seven year olds to be taught through the medium of Welsh. There are a number of actions relating to this including:

- Establishing a Welsh medium School in Welshpool
- Developing Welsh medium in mid Powys
- Add more Welsh places in Ystradgynlais (the current provision is at capacity)
- Develop provision in Llanidloes
- Consider position in Gwernyfed where at present no Welsh medium although have already undertaken area review here
- Move Ysgol Bro Hyddgen along the language continuum – at present it is a dual stream 4-18 school with 218:303 English:Welsh speakers. There is concern that appropriate standards in the English stream can be maintained.

Questions

The objectives make sense but objective 3 is outside the authorities control with no teacher training institution within the county and little Welsh medium training.

The Portfolio Holder advised that there was a link with teacher training institutions and that it is important to make more use of the existing teacher cohort who are Welsh speaking but not using their Welsh language in the classroom. It is also intended to make greater use of teachers who do teach in Welsh to teach at more than one school. E-learning is a further option for providing courses on multiple sites.

The Director of Education confirmed that the only way to meet the target was by way of generating and meeting demand for Welsh medium education. The speed by which this can be done is related to the workforce strategy to increase skills and confidence for existing teachers and working with Further Education providers to encourage an increase of Welsh speaking early years provision.

If there are a number of staff who are not using their Welsh language skills it is the Governing Body who should be working towards providing Welsh medium courses. Could peripatetic teachers be employed to increase specialist Welsh language teaching?

The Portfolio Holder noted that the authority was on a journey and that the Athrawon Bro (Welsh language support service) had moved from providing

Welsh language teaching to enabling school staff to develop and confidently use their own Welsh language skills.

What is happening in north east Powys?

The Portfolio Holder advised that with the new Schools Policy the authority welcome applications from groups of schools for collaborative working. Any changes proposed do need to go through lengthy statutory procedures.

What is happening in Ystradgynlais where the primary pupils from Ysgol Gymraeg Dyffryn y Glowyr, Cwmtwrch all go to high school in Ystalyfera across the border which makes the viability of Maesydderwen High School in question?

The Senior Manager Schools Transformation acknowledged that this is a conundrum. There is a knock on impact on English medium provision.

The Portfolio Holder commented that the authority needed to be flexible and creative to meet the needs of communities.

Why are catchment members not consulted when area schools are planned. For example for the new area Welsh medium school in Welshpool only the town members were consulted not the catchment members. The Governing Body should contain local authority representatives from across the catchment not just within the ward that the school is sited.

This point is noted and the Governing Body articles will need to be amended to reflect this.

Dual stream schools at primary level can be successful but can present problems including higher costs and management challenges. Area schools may overcome these challenges.

The Portfolio Holder acknowledged that dual stream schools are expensive but so are buses (£68k a day is spent on school transport). There are challenges and opportunities and the authority wants to be flexible and work with the community.

How can English speaking parents support their children through Welsh medium education?

Schools are able to work with parents to provide resources to support their child's education. There is only one school in Powys with more than 60% of parents who speak Welsh so schools are developing packages to provide support.

How can education be fairly provided in schools where there is a large mismatch between students in the two streams? For example there is a school where class sizes in the English stream are 34 and in the Welsh stream are 3.

The Director of Education confirmed it was sometime since a thorough review of the Funding Formula had been undertaken. There we proposals for the 2018/19 period which would put additional funding into dual stream schools but for 2019/20 a fundamental review was planned to include examining

- the breadth of curriculum offer
- the elements that support buildings
- ALN and inclusion
- Reasonable teacher:pupil ratios
- Reasonable contact time
- A basic level of leadership/management

It is expected that this will be more than can be afforded and a dampening period will be needed. This information can be used to evidence a request for school funding in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The schematic and key engagement dates can be provided to scrutiny.

The Portfolio Holder advised that this review will identify which schools are more or less prudent.

How can staff be encouraged to attend Welsh training who work in small schools?

The Portfolio Holder acknowledged this difficulty and wanted to provide flexible and good quality training.

At present there are a number of pupils in the Brecon area who are being bussed to different schools. Can the authority consider removing this funding to make Brecon Welsh stream viable?

At present Brecon has a developing Welsh stream with 23 pupils and is not sufficiently strong to be able to remove funding to transport pupils to other Welsh streams. It is hoped that a strong Welsh stream will encourage more pupils to choose Brecon.

Recommended that:

There is a responsibility for Governing Bodies to play their part in encouraging the use of Welsh language and in the provision of Welsh stream classes. This should be reflected in the WESP.

That Education Scrutiny monitor the implementation of the 2017-2020 WESP (annually in the autumn) and that pre-Cabinet scrutiny be undertaken in 2019 for development of the 2020 WESP.

That the local authority representation on Governing Body's for area schools reflect the area not just the ward in which the school is sited.

The schematics and key engagement dates for the Review of the Funding Formula be provided to scrutiny.

11. JOINT CHAIRS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Joint Chairs and Vice-Chairs Steering Group held on the 10th October 2017 and 7th November 2017 were noted.

Members expressed concern that attendance at these meetings was poor as these meetings were key to good scrutiny.

12. SCHOOLS POLICY

The Schools Manager Schools Transformation introduced the Draft Schools Policy which is out for consultation (copy filed with signed minutes).

The Portfolio Holder and Director of Education provided additional detail in response to questions and it is the view of scrutiny that it should not be necessary to question the Portfolio Holder and Director of Education to gain an understanding of the Policy. The Policy should contain sufficient detail to be standalone.

The following observations are made:

- The Policy outlines high level aspirations and is short on the level of detail which would be expected in such a policy as to how these will be achieved. It needs to be motivational.
- There is particular lack of detail regarding the financial sustainability of schools and reference needs to be made to the Formula Funding review
- In respect of alternative models of delivery these will need to be based on sound educational principles and research and consideration should be given to referencing this in Section 3 paragraph 4 of the Policy
- Section 5 rightly includes leadership as a key consideration with appropriate aspirations. Consideration should be given to including a similar section on teaching and aspirations relating thereto
- Post 16 provision needs additional detail regarding the current work which is being undertaken with providers. The document acknowledges that schools are challenged by increased competition from out of county providers and notes that joint working will be undertaken to provide a curriculum that meets the needs of learners. This will have to be considerably more attractive than at present. Learners are demonstrating that they are prepared to travel considerable distances and spend a considerable amount of time to access excellent provision on single sites, something the collaborative curriculum within Powys has demonstrably not been able to compete with. There is an urgent need to progress this part of the Policy.
- There is a lack of reference to the role of Governors in supporting the aims of the authority expressed within this policy. Governors will need training and support to fulfil their role.
- There is a lack of reference to early years which are intimately linked to school provision and should be referenced
- The opportunities offered by e-learning should be included with an acknowledgment of what can be delivered using the current infrastructure and what would be needed to fully access the opportunities offered by this technology
- With regard to Governance if the Learning and Skills Programme Board are monitoring progress on the Work Programme they should also be involved in the setting of the Work Programme

13.	WORK PROGRAMME
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The following items were raised:

- A request that Safeguarding was considered jointly by Scrutiny Committee A and B
- That the progress of the School Transport Policy be queried given that it had been due to come to Cabinet in October

County Councillor P Roberts (Chair)

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