

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LEARNING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT BY TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 26 MAY 2020

PRESENT: Mrs A. Davies (Chair)
County Councillors J Berriman, B Davies, S C Davies, K Laurie-Parry, L Roberts, R G Thomas, and Mrs S. Davies, Mrs M Evitts and G Robson (Co-Opted Members)

Cabinet Portfolio Holders In Attendance: County Councillors P Davies (Portfolio Holder for Education and Property), G Breeze (Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance and Engagement)

Officers: L Lovell (Interim Chief Education Officer), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager and Head of Democratic Services) and Clive Pinney (Head of Legal and Democratic Services)

1.	APOLOGIES
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Apologies for absence were received from the Chair, County Councillor P Roberts, County Councillor E Roderick (on other Council business) and from the Chief Executive Dr C Turner.

2.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
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There were no disclosures of interest from Members relating to items to be considered on the agenda.

3.	DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP
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The Committee did not receive any disclosures of prohibited party whips which a Member has been given in relation to the meeting in accordance with Section 78(3) of the Local Government Measure 2011.

4.	FREE SCHOOL MEALS UPDATE
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The Committee received the report of the Professional Lead, Catering and Cleaning.

Issues Discussed:

- Feedback from parents was positive and that the voucher scheme is working well and simple to use.
- Questions:

Is people's preference to receive vouchers or cash through BACS payments	This is decided on a case by case basis and whatever suits people best.
Is the Council preference to use vouchers	Yes
How are parents who do not have a bank account able to access cash or vouchers	The Council works with each individual. There have been no issues to date.
Was the cost of providing vouchers looked at, before the scheme started	The Council looked at the numbers of pupils entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) to make sure that they

	received support. These types of systems are expensive.
Are all children entitled to have some provision for food.	Yes
There must be a greater administration cost for the scheme. Is Welsh Government providing additional funding.	The Council will be applying to Welsh Government for funding support in the future.
Are there any outstanding areas of concern	No the Council is as far forward as it can be and it is further ahead than some other Councils in providing this scheme.
If the need for the scheme continues beyond the school term, is there an idea of the cost and where the funding will come from.	These scheme may have to operate into the summer. The funding for this has been discussed with Welsh Government.
How can the Council make sure that everyone entitled to is accessing the scheme	The Council has a register of those entitled to FSM and all of those have been contacted. Others are being added to the register as time progresses and the education service is working with other services to identify other who should be added to the register.
Are Councillors able to assist by checking if people are accessing the scheme in their area	It is not possible to provide this personal data to Councillors and parents might not want others to know that they are using the scheme.

Outcome:

- **Noted.**

5. EDTECH PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Committee received the report of the Portfolio Holders for Corporate Governance and Engagement and Education and Property.

Issues Discussed:

- The grant is for the provision of equipment and installation.
- Laptops for the Edtech programme were ordered but have not been received. The Council therefore used laptops not being used in schools which would be replaced.
- Some learners were still excluded due to a lack of broadband and therefore wifi dongles were funded from the Edtech programme which reduces the grant available to the Council.
- Caerphilly Council acted as the brokers for Welsh Government in the scheme and managed to obtain very good prices from suppliers for the purchase of equipment.
- Questions:

The Council identified a need for 800 laptops and only had 400	The Council obtained laptops from the schools and then worked with
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	schools to apportion devices to pupils.
Have all schools got access to Microsoft teams	Yes schools have Teams and also governors as well
For youngsters and schools having access to technology, what is the starting age to this access	As soon as a pupil starts school they have their own HWB account and email. This is available to all learners.
There are longer term opportunities arising from remote access to excluded youngsters, and we need to make sure that equipment is not recovered too soon	There are opportunities for both Continuity of Learning but also blended learning and the equipment gives the opportunity for these types of learning. It also gives the opportunity to access learning and teaching, and for pupils who might otherwise have difficulties being in a school setting.
Would this provide benefits for home schooled children by providing a greater structure for their learning	Yes
With capital being spent throughout schools is any thought being given to school modernisation	Yes this is taken into account whilst all learners in all settings are treated equally
Would it have been beneficial to use Caerphilly Council's installation contractors or have HOWPS procured contractors that are offering the same or better prices for Powys	The procurement power for Caerphilly Council was in buying the equipment on behalf of all Councils in Wales. The installation of the equipment is for local contractors and providers. The Council used HOWPS under a framework contract and HOWPS utilise local contractors.
Why is there an additional cost if the arrangement continues more than 12 months	Welsh Government worked with digital providers and the agreement was for a 12 month period. If the agreement goes over the 12 month period that is when there would be additional costs.
Can this programme be sustained after the initial stages and what funding is there for this to happen	As part of the Council's plan a sustainability plan had to be included. ICT and Education have said that they would sustain this after the project i.e. updating the cabling. There is also agreement in principle with schools to make sure the programme is sustained.
Does this funding come from school budgets	The cost of the network will come from central budgets and the equipment cost will come from the schools delegated budget
Are all staff trained and able to use the equipment	This is transformational and also transformational in the form of

	teaching. A link to the Open University has been provided for staff to learn how to undertake online teaching. Schools also help each other.
Safeguarding – is every downloaded video and music barred or only specific artists	The agreement between Welsh Government and digital providers is that downloading from other music apps such as Apple Music is not allowed
Is it the machines where the barring takes place	No it is the digital provider that would bar the information through the dongle
If children are digitally excluded, this is almost being reinforced by stopping music and video. Will pupils miss out	Welsh Government took the view that this is about providing digital learning. There could also be an issue with downloading in the amount of mobile data which is available. Some of these music sites are subscription sites and the focus is on learning.
Is the cost of the installation of equipment paid for by Welsh Government or from school budgets. Is the Council paying more to HOWPS for this.	The costs are paid for from the grant not by schools for phases 1 and 2. The HOWPS cost comes from the national fee as well, and the Council pays HOWPS against a framework contract so there are no additional costs.
Can pupils access a digital support group for their age group	The Council is looking to support Year 6 pupils in particular, especially with the transition from Year 6 to Year 7. There is guidance from Welsh Government regarding safeguarding.
Can pupils access social media sites, especially primary school children	The scheme does not exclude these sites as access is across all age groups. Downloading is data hungry which social media is not.

Outcome:

- **Noted.**

6. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be on 5th June 2020 – 13.00 to 14.00 and would be considering the Schools Transport Policy.

Further meetings will be held on:
 22 June 2020 - 1.00 p.m. – 2.00 p.m.
 6 July 2020 - 1.00 p.m. – 2.00 p.m.
 20 July 2020 - 1.00 p.m. – 2.00 p.m.

Mrs A Davies (Chair)