

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LEARNING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE HELD AT BY TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 11 NOVEMBER 2020**

PRESENT: County Councillor P Roberts (Chairman)  
County Councillors J Berriman, S C Davies, D R Jones, K Laurie-Parry, E Roderick,  
L Roberts, R G Thomas, and Co-Opted Members A Davies, S. Davies, M Evitts and  
G Robson

Cabinet Portfolio Holders In Attendance: County Councillors P Davies (Portfolio  
Holder for Education and Property) and A W Davies (Portfolio Holder for Finance and  
Transport)

Officers: Lynette Lovell (Interim Chief Education Officer), Eurig Towns (Senior  
Challenge Advisor), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager and Head of Democratic  
Services), Jennie Spraggon (Finance Business Partner), Mari Thomas (Finance  
Manager), Anwen Orrells (Senior Manager – Education Services) and Hayley Smith  
(Interim Senior Manager; Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion)

<b>1.</b>	<b>APOLOGIES</b>
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An apology for absence was received from County Councillor B. Davies.

<b>2.</b>	<b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b>
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The Committee received a briefing by the Scrutiny Manager and Head of Democratic Services in relation to interests under item 5 on the agenda – progress on Schools Causing Concern and the need to disclose a Personal Interests as a governor appointed by the Council and a Personal and Prejudicial Interest if the Member was a governor of a school discussed where they were appointed otherwise than by the Council e.g. community governor.

The Committee received the following declarations of a Personal Interest from Members as LEA appointed governors:

County Councillors L Roberts, E Roderick, J Berriman, G Thomas, P Roberts and Co-Opted Member S Davies.

<b>3.</b>	<b>DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP</b>
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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.

<b>4.</b>	<b>PERFORMANCE REPORT AND RISK REGISTER</b>
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4.1. Draft Performance Report -Quarter 2, 2020-21

**Documents Considered:**

- Draft Performance Report – Quarter 2, 2020-21

**Issues Discussed:**

- Corporate Quarter 2 report. Due to the pandemic end of Key Stage Assessments not undertaken due to the closure and repurposing of schools. Examinations also not undertaken, so comparative data is not available. The quarter 2 information therefore does not have quantitative data but has a narrative in the report.
- The Service has been involved in the corporate response to Covid, working closely with schools in preparation for reopening in September, with all children back in school by 14<sup>th</sup> September. Work has also been undertaken on the blended learning approach which was required to deliver the curriculum.
- Work has been ongoing on the well-being support to schools (pupils, staff and Education Service staff) as well as moving ahead with the Transformation agenda.

- **Questions:**

Transformation streams - Can you provide an indication of how well they are tracking the profiles which were expected i.e. ahead or behind schedule	This is part of the Council's business critical work and momentum has been maintained with work on schedule to bring papers to the Cabinet in forthcoming months. All aspects of the ALN agenda are on track and the pandemic has spearheaded the work on well-being with a new strategy having been launched. Mental health champions being developed in schools.
When the Hubs were established there was support from the Health Board for mental health and well-being. This was to transition to support at a cluster level. Has that happened and how well is it working.	Yes, it has happened and there is a Team around the cluster model in place with each of the agencies being involved in that team.
Will this continue after the pandemic as it is a positive move.	Yes, this will become a permanent way of multi-agency working.
Page 19 – Year 11 NEETS. How are young people not in school able to engage with information about where next. Schools are working remotely with pupils, but how is the Service connecting with those that have already left school.	As pupils were not in school before the summer break, some might have not found places yet in continuing education. The Youth Service is working with these young people to find college courses or employment.
What are the greatest areas of concern for the Service at present.	Schools and pupils are concerned mostly about what happens next in

	<p>terms of assessments. The Minister had announced that there would not be examinations in Wales in 2021, and Geraint Rees who is an Education Consultant has been asked to join a Welsh Government Board to manage that.</p> <p>Following the announcement that assessments will be used in place of examinations, discussions have been held with secondary schools regarding how to identify good practice and webcasts will be set up for pupils to support them through the assessment process. ERW have agreed to support the Service and will identify good practice across all Powys schools and will set up workshops for all schools and pupils to have access to the arrangements for assessments.</p>
<p>There is a potential for a substantial increase in workloads for teachers in undertaking assessments. Is an approach of appointing one teacher as a topic lead who could then assist others being considered.</p>	<p>Yes, this is being considered.</p>
<p>How many full time equivalent staff does the Health Board provide working with clusters.</p>	<p>There are several members of staff from the Health Board supporting the clusters. There are 13 clusters so 13 areas of need. Some staff may only support one or two clusters e.g. CAMHS service. This is the same for staff from Children's Services or other Education support staff.</p>
<p>Could the Committee receive a briefing note on the support teams being developed around the cluster.</p>	<p>This can be forwarded to Members of the Committee.</p>
<p>Decision not to hold examinations – is it true that pupils sitting examinations from English examination Boards will still be sitting examinations.</p>	<p>This is correct but it is only likely to impact on private schools as Powys schools would be following the WJEC examination syllabus. There has also not been a decision in England as yet regarding the summer examinations in 2021.</p>
<p>Is it not the case that Powys schools can pick and mix which examination Boards they use or has this changed.</p>	<p>It has changed and now it is only the WJEC examination syllabus that is followed in Wales for academic courses. For vocational courses these could be based on English syllabuses e.g. City and Guilds qualifications.</p>

<p>This is now the second year where there have been no examinations. Will the Service be discussing with Welsh Government if this process using assessments is the way forward in future rather than reverting to examinations.</p>	<p>This period has provided an opportunity to review how this is done in future. However there is concern for Year 12 pupils who may not have sat a GCSE or AS examination having to revert back to examinations at A level. An accelerated learning plan is in place and schools have identified those pupils that need support.</p>
<p>Page 9 – 1144 parents – have they received free school meal vouchers for their children. How many children are eligible for free school meals and do those that are eligible receive free school meals.</p>	<p>All schools hold this information and they do send information to parents about eligibility. It is then for the parents to apply.</p>
<p>It is likely that there will be an increase in numbers seeking Council Tax reduction. Is there anything within that process to trigger the applicant to find out if they are entitled to free school meals.</p>	<p>The Council needs to ensure that there is signposting of individuals to the eligibility criteria for free school meals. The Service during the period has been working to identify those pupils eligible for free school meals and working with the Income and Awards Section to identify those families for free school meals, uniform grants, or any other grants available. Learners have also been provided with digital devices to ensure they can access their learning.</p>
<p>Grants. School uniform grant 413 contacts from families were received but only 328 claims made. Child Looked After Grant, 102 families made contact but only 19 claimed. What does this tell us.</p>	<p>The contact came from the Service on a number of occasions, and working with schools, and then it is up to the families to claim. However, the Service would also be looking to support families in making a claim.</p>
<p>Is the process for applying for the grant too onerous.</p>	<p>Even though the family has been contacted it does not mean that they are all eligible for the grant. Some may also not wish to take up the grant even though they are entitled to it.</p>
<p>Page 9 – Detached Youth Work - 183 young people between 16 and 25 needing support – is this the holistic figure.</p>	<p>The detached youth team work with young people on a one to one basis, working with young people that might find themselves homeless, or requiring support. This is the figure of young people that have been supported during this period. The numbers are currently rising and there are an increasing number of pupils who do not wish to return to</p>

	<p>school at this time or whose parents do not want them to be returning to school currently.</p>
<p>Is there staff capacity to deal with the increasing numbers.</p>	<p>The Youth and Schools Services are working closely to identify those young people who require such support. There is capacity currently within the Youth Service.</p>
<p>How many detached youth workers are there, are there teams north, mid and south.</p>	<p>Yes. There is the Open Access Youth Service and the Detached Youth Team. The Detached Youth Team work within schools. Every Secondary School has an Open Access Youth Worker attached to it.</p>
<p>Meals vouchers and clothing allowances – do Youth Workers undertake work with families who have been identified as potentially eligible for these grants to support them in claiming the grants.</p>	<p>Youth Workers do work with individual young people. Open Access Youth Workers have also been undertaking outreach work during the period of the pandemic to support young people. Youth Workers and all avenues open to the Council should be used to encourage families to take up the available grants.</p>
<p>Can the briefing note distinguish the differences between the team around the cluster and team around the family.</p>	<p>The team around the family and early support is very different from the team around the cluster. The team around the cluster is informal support / communication to ensure that all schools understand the services available to them. Professionals also have a direct link to schools. Individual and family support is in addition to this.</p>
<p>The figures for face to face Child Protection visits and Child Looked After visits added together are 2305. This has a significant impact on schools as the schools are dealing with and supporting those children. What are the normal figures and are these skewed by the pandemic.</p>	<p>This is a question which needs to be referred to Children's Services for a response. The Portfolio Holder advised the Committee that of these visits 96% had been achieved within the required timescale which was an achievement during the pandemic.</p>
<p>As there is no formal examination data available, does the Service have any information on where pupils are in terms of achievement.</p>	<p>Estyn made a recommendation about improving standards in schools. The Service is working closely with schools looking at blended learning, speaking to learners to obtain qualitative data about where schools are positioned in terms of standards. Even though comparative data is not available the Service does have an idea of where schools are in terms of</p>

	standards. Work has been undertaken with schools on the assessment and moderation processes. Schools did undertake rigorous assessment and moderation, outcomes were challenged and a very evidence based process took place.
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**Outcomes:**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Action By / Completion Date</b>
<b>Briefing note on the support around the cluster to be circulated to Members</b>	<b>WR</b>
<b>Chair to request relevant Portfolio Holder(s) to confirm that individuals are signposted to the eligibility criteria for free school meals.</b>	<b>PR</b>
<b>Service to provide a report outlining the support provided to vulnerable families for a future meeting.</b>	<b>LL</b>
<b>That the question regarding Child Protection and Looked After Children visits be referred to the Head of Children's Services for a response.</b>	<b>WR</b>

4.2. Strategic Risk Register

**Documents Considered:**

- Strategic Risk Register

**Issues Discussed:**

- Two areas of risk are school budgets and the post inspection action plan. The risks for the post inspection plan are around Recommendations 1 (secondary schools) and 5 (budgets) from Estyn. The register has been reviewed on a weekly basis during the Covid period to ensure that the mitigating actions are up to date.

- Questions:

<p>Page 36 – 16,000 learners in Powys, 881 have been provided with digital devices, 532 with dongles. Were we able to get equipment out to everyone that needed it.</p>	<p>The requests for laptops and mobile devices were handled by schools. Some families had 2 devices. Whilst wi-fi may have been available in some homes families may have only had one device which had to be shared between parents and pupils. This would account for some of the anomalies. From the information available the Service is confident that pupils were using the equipment available. Since the return to school laptops and mobile devices have been returned to schools. Schools are now dealing with remote learning</p>
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	within any lockdown periods and have their own plans in place to deliver this. The schools can therefore provide devices as required.
What is the position for school pupils who live in an area with no broadband and poor wi-fi provision.	Schools make sure that the information is shared with pupils. This could be by the provision of a paper copy of the information or the information being collected for the pupil. Each school is planning their use of digital and blended learning to suit their pupils.

**Outcomes:**

- **Noted.**

<b>5. PROGRESS ON SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN</b>
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5.1. Report - Progress on Schools Causing Concern

**Documents Considered:**

- Report of the Portfolio Holder for Education and Property.

**Issues Discussed:**

- Recommendation 5 from Estyn is that the Service continues to improve the financial management in schools and to take action to address schools with significant deficit budgets.
- 12 warning notices were issued in July 2019, bringing the total of warning notices to 13. Meetings were held with these schools with warning notices to try and reduce the growing deficit. Clear actions were set up with these schools.
- 4 warning notices have since been withdrawn. Recovery plans from schools have been submitted to the Council in October 2020. As a result of the recovery plans there are a further 2 schools whose warning notices will be reviewed in January 2021.
- Welsh Government has been providing funding where schools have incurred additional costs due to Covid.

- **Questions:**

Are schools able to claim the additional heating costs from Welsh Government	This is a question for Welsh Government. Welsh Government has been very clear in what could be claimed.
HR issues delayed by Covid will affect budget planning. Will those changes be made by the end of the financial year.	There are processes now in place to ensure that processes such as HR processes can be undertaken, either virtually or face to face.
Transformation programme – some will result in school closures and reopening, others not. What does the Council have in place to ensure schools maintain financial	Schools have already been advised that financial management is maintained and schools that are being closed are being monitored to ensure that deficits do not build up.

<p>management even when going through changes and what protection is being put in place during the transformation process.</p>	<p>This has included the use of spending restrictions where authorisation is required for spending over certain limits. Where schools are not transforming and there are deficits, the Service is working to ensure that learners are getting the required learning whilst the schools is working to reduce the deficit.</p>
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**Outcomes:**

- **Noted.**

5.2. Exempt Item

RESOLVED to exclude the public for the following item of business on the grounds that there would be disclosure to them of exempt information under category 3 of The Local Authorities (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007).

The Monitoring Officer has determined that category 3 of the Access to Information Procedure Rules applies to the following item. His view on the public interest test (having taken account of the provisions of Rule 14.8 of the Council's Access to Information Rules) was that to make this information public would disclose information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

These factors in his view outweigh the public interest in disclosing this information. Members are asked to consider these factors when determining the public interest test, which they must decide when considering excluding the public from this part of the meeting.

5.3. Members' Briefing - Schools Causing Concern

The Committee received the following declarations of a Personal Interest from Members as LEA appointed governors:

County Councillors L Roberts, E Roderick, J Berriman, G Thomas, P Roberts and Co-Opted Member S Davies.

**Documents Considered:**

- Confidential briefing on Schools Causing Concern.

**Outcomes:**

Action	Action By / Completion Date
<p>The Funding Review Group be asked to consider the issue of reductions in pupil numbers and its impact where remaining pupil numbers place the school on the threshold of a lower funding band.</p>	
<p>Interim Chief Education Officer to provide</p>	<p>LL</p>



<b>update to the Committee on numbers of pupils in 6<sup>th</sup> form.</b>	
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<b>6. WORK PROGRAMME</b>
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The Committee noted that the forthcoming meetings of the Committee were as follows:

16/12/20	14.00 - 16.00	
15-01-21	AM	Performance Q3 + Risk
25-01-21	PM	Budget
26-02-21	PM	
01-04-21	AM	
14-05-21	AM	Performance Q4 + Risk
24-06-21	AM	
10-09-21	AM	Performance Q1+ Risk
22-10-21	AM	Performance Q2+ Risk
03-12-21	AM	

**County Councillor P Roberts (Chairman)**