

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LEARNING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD AT BY TEAMS ON FRIDAY, 31 JULY 2020**

PRESENT: County Councillor P Roberts (Chairman)
County Councillors B Davies, S C Davies, D R Jones, E Roderick, and Co-Opted
Members Mrs A Davies, Mrs 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,
Countryside and Transport)

Officers: L Lovell (Interim Chief Education Officer), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager
and Head of Democratic Services), H Smith (Interim Senior Manager; Additional
Learning Needs and Inclusion) and A Orrells (Senior Manager – Education Services)

1.	APOLOGIES
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Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors J Berriman, L Roberts, K Laurie-Parry.

2.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
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There were no declarations of interest from Members relating to items for consideration 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 had been given in relation to the meeting in accordance with Section 78(3) of the Local Government Measure 2011.

4.	SCRUTINY ITEMS
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The Chair reported back on a decision taken at the previous meeting in respect of the financial position of Ysgol Calon Cymru. Following the meeting the Chair took advice from officers and a request was made for SWAP to undertake an investigation to look at the structures, the decision making process, the reports that were received which have resulted in the current position with Ysgol Calon Cymru. The draft report is expected in September or October 2020.

The urgency of the issue was due to an increasing deficit and as the Council is about to undertake a major review of the school estate, and it is important that the Council understands the issues and learns lessons from the setting up of this school before moving forward with the transformation process.

The Portfolio Holder for Education and the Interim Chief Education Officer welcomed this investigation. The Committee was advised by a Challenge Adviser, that lessons had already been learned and a different approach used in the establishment of the new school in Llanfyllin for example by the early appointment of a business manager to support the school.

A Member asked if the Committee could have sight of the issues arising from the establishment of Ysgol Calon Cymru as it could be used to challenge future proposals. The Chair advised the Committee that these would be detailed in the SWAP report. Another Member suggested that the Council should not be comparing Ysgol Calon Cymru with an all through school such as Llanfyllin but look at another dual site school such as the Newtown and Presteigne school.

4.1. Scrutiny of the Decision in relation to the Four week Term in July and the Autumn Term Break

Documents Considered:

- Report on the re-opening of schools in Powys for four weeks until 24th July, 2020.

Issues Discussed:

- This arose following the Minister's announcement regarding the reopening of schools, and Welsh Government's proposal that check-in, catch-up and prepare for September would extend the term for a further week in July as well as a proposal to extend the October half term break by an additional week.

- Questions:

Did every school and every setting open for the four weeks	All schools and all settings opened for the fourth week. The Council did consult with all headteachers and key partners such as the Unions about the proposals to take account of the well-being of staff and learners and the support received for the fourth week was overwhelming. The fourth week and the guidance being received from Welsh Government also assisted the Council in its preparations for September.
The interaction with headteachers and unions is important. Could you expand on that and why there was such positivity within Powys when other authorities were not getting the same response.	Regular engagement was undertaken with the unions, governors, elected members which was welcomed. The headteachers' union supported the proposals as well.
Feedback from children is that they welcomed going back to school for the fourth week, and especially welcomed by those transitioning into secondary schools. Does the Council have the percentage figure for how many children attended school during the 4 week period.	Week 1 - 73%; Week 2 - 74%; Week 3 – 78%;Week 4 - 78%. With regard to transitioning this related to all ages including those moving from early years to schools.
Of the 22% of pupils that did not attend, what percentage of pupils were classed as shielded.	This information is held by the schools and the information could be provided following the meeting.

<p>Could the Portfolio Holder and officers expand the detail about the October half term in terms of the predicted modelling.</p>	<p>Normality going forward will contain an element of distance and blended learning and the authority needs to be prepared for this. Should there be a further spike in the pandemic, this is one reason for the recommendation by the Minister for an additional week in October, as the data when the recommendation was made that there could be a further spike around the half term period.</p> <p>The Interim Chief Education Officer advised the Committee that 3 contingency plans had been prepared for the Autumn term i.e. for a full lockdown, a partial reopening of schools, and a full reopening. Part of the contingency plans include blended learning. With the range of plans that have been prepared the Council believes it is prepared for the Autumn term. There was no outbreak or Covid-19 in any of the emergency childcare hubs and the plans for the emergency hubs were highly effective.</p>
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There have been some comments from schools that some pupils seem to have lost confidence and appear to be fragile and around 50% were not engaging, so returning to school was a good thing to regain that confidence and start engaging again. Other comments supported the return to school and how this benefitted those transitioning to secondary school. The Council was praised for its approach and particularly around digital learning which has been successful.

Outcome:

Noted.

4.2. Report of the Children's Commissioner in Wales regarding Vulnerable Learners

Documents Considered:

- Powys Schools Service Covid-19 Response

Issues Discussed:

- There was a great deal of commonality between this report and the final item on the agenda.
- The report shows the collaborative work which was undertaken by services in Powys.
- In relation to blended learning a Teaching and Learning Group developed guidance for schools to support blended learning, support for emotional

well-being of pupils, support for pupils and for parents. While teaching was key it was important to support pupils and parents as well.

- Questions:

<p>It is important that both teachers and pupils are ready for blended learning. The report under paragraph 2.1 states what has been done for digital connectivity. Have all of these been used, are there still connectivity problems in any areas. Is the Council confident if there were a full lockdown that education could be delivered in the next academic year.</p>	<p>The collaborative work between catchment schools during the period has been important, especially in getting devices out quickly to those that did not have access to such devices previously. The support of Welsh Government was also important in accessing wi-fi dongles so that pupils could access services such as HWB.</p>
<p>Has there been an audit of the additional hardware support needed for new learners attending schools in September and what are the plans to get devices out to pupils if this is necessary</p>	<p>The original devices were issued from the hub schools and should now have been returned. Any damaged devices should have been replaced. The Committee received assurances that there are adequate digital devices in schools to accommodate new learners in September and if not they can be procured quickly.</p>
<p>Has the authority got figures for numbers of pupils that have not connected at all digitally during the pandemic as these pupils may need additional support and training in September.</p>	<p>Each pupil connecting to HWB is logged. However this information would be dealt with at a school level. Pupils are being encouraged to use the resources available to them and on average 85% of learners were able to and had logged onto HWB. However this does not include all the foundation phase where pupils did not always have a need for digital devices. Much of the foundation phase learning is in the outdoors and practical. This was a broad curriculum which could be undertaken at home with families.</p>
<p>Safeguarding – has there been an increase in safeguarding issues or disclosures since pupils have returned to school</p>	<p>The Council is anticipating an increase in disclosures and there have been some in the last four weeks. What the Council has also seen is an increased number of children requiring counselling during the period particularly in Year 5 and 6 which has seen a 60% increase. There has also been an increase in instances of domestic violence during the period. Schools are</p>

	<p>considering what types of support pupils will need on return in September either academic or well-being support.</p> <p>Additional funding for counselling provision has been made available by Welsh Government and some face to face counselling is being made available in schools over the summer.</p>
<p>Is the Council getting sufficient support from Powys Teaching Local Health Board in relation to access to counsellors</p>	<p>There is a strong collaboration between services over the period. There has been a waiting list to see counsellors due to the increased numbers but that has been reduced. There have also been a number of pupils who did not wish to receive counselling virtually and would prefer to wait for face to face counselling.</p>
<p>Did Powys People Direct have the capacity to deal with the numbers of referrals. How long on average was the wait for counselling.</p>	<p>This information can be provided. One of the key areas the Service was also working on was the Team around the hub which then became the Team around the cluster, so that not only individual counselling could be provided but also training and support and group work for certain groups of young people.</p>
<p>More cluster working has been one of the benefits of this period. How will this be embedded in future so these benefits are not lost.</p>	<p>The Team around the cluster has been a success. From September each cluster will have a named person for example for ALN, Educational Welfare Officer, CAMHS Counsellor etc. This joint working approach is an exciting development for the future. This is Education and Children's Services staff with Powys Health Board staff.</p>
<p>Year 11 and Year 13 Pupils</p>	<p>A virtual open day was arranged for North Powys and South Powys pupils in conjunction with all the schools. During those days questions were answered as to support available to pupils, 6th form provision available, and where pupils could go for support. As a result schools undertook their own virtual days with Year 11 pupils.</p>
<p>How have the last 6 weeks assisted the Service's management in its widest context</p>	<p>What has been demonstrated over the last few months is that the Services has a strong team, with</p>

	strong leadership by the Portfolio Holder. The Service has worked far more collaboratively with headteachers and other stakeholders using digital technology.
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Outcomes:

Noted

4.3. Scrutiny of Decisions taken during the Covid-19 outbreak period

Documents Considered:

- Report – Education Response to Covid-19

Issues Discussed:

- Childcare Hubs.

- Questions:

<p>Some hubs have moved from schools to leisure centres, not necessarily in the same towns. How was this transition.</p>	<p>There were challenges in moving these venues. There was concern about capacity for key workers' children and where it was felt that there was insufficient capacity in schools, leisure centres were utilised in 5 settings where children could not be cared for in their own schools.</p> <p>It was clear that as more key workers returned to work there would be a need for increased capacity for their children. Powys was the only Council that made that additional childcare provision available. With the additional week of schools being opened this meant that there was an additional week's care for the children of key workers.</p>
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The Interim Senior Manager, Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion advised the Committee that the PRU had been asked to contribute to an Estyn best practice case study on supporting vulnerable young people during lockdown. The Portfolio Holder for Education referred to the Estyn report on Community Schools where one of the Ystradgynlais schools had been included in the case study.

Outcomes:

Noted

5.	WORK PROGRAMME
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The Committee noted that the next meetings will be held as follows:

07-09-2020	10.00 a.m. – 12.00 p.m.	Item: School Transport Policy
07-10-2020	14.30 p.m. – 16.30 p.m.	
11-11-2020	14.00 p.m. – 16.00 p.m.	
16-12-2020	14.00 p.m. – 16.00 p.m.	

The Scrutiny Manager indicated that following the last meeting of the Improvement and Assurance Board there would be a role for scrutiny to consider performance reports. The Chair advised that it may be necessary to hold another meeting in September to deal with School Budgets for 2020-21 which were deferred from a previous meeting.

County Councillor P Roberts (Chairman)