

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LEARNING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD AT BY ZOOM ON THURSDAY, 8 JULY 2021**

PRESENT: County Councillor P Roberts (Chairman)
County Councillors B Davies, S C Davies, L Roberts, J Berriman, A Jenner,
DW Meredith, C Mills, J M Williams.
Co-Opted Members: A Davies, S. Davies and M Evitts

Cabinet Portfolio Holders In Attendance: P Davies (Portfolio Holder for Education and Property) and A 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), Marianne Evans (Senior Manager - Education Services), Mari Thomas (Finance Manager) and Delyth Jones (Challenge Advisor)

1.	APOLOGIES
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Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors T J Van-Rees, E Roderick and D R Jones, G Robson (Co-Opted Member) and from E Palmer (Head of Transformation and Communications)

2.	DISCLOSURES 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 has been given in relation to the meeting in accordance with Section 78(3) of the Local Government Measure 2011.

4.	CASTLE CAEREINION
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Documents Considered:

- Report of the Portfolio Holder for Education and Property.

Issues Discussed:

- Castle Caereinion is a Church in Wales Primary School with 23 pupils on roll
- The case for change included low pupil numbers – 19 on roll from September 2021, a high budget per pupil (£6919 per pupil by comparison to the Powys average of £4264 per pupil) and issues with the building (condition B in 2009 now condition C in 2020). Combined age classes is an factor with a number of year groups in two classes. There are also leadership issues at the school with no permanent headteacher and significant teaching commitments for the current headteacher.
- In relation to the presumption against closure of rural schools and the School Organisation Code, Welsh Government guidance had been followed and the options reassessed following the consultation together

with other options arising from the consultation. The same recommendation was reached following the reassessment.

- Questions:

<p>One issue raised was that some of the more elderly members of the community had no access to the internet and felt they could not take a full part in the consultation. Was this an issue.</p>	<p>The consultation information was made available by a number of means including hard copies on request. The consultation was published in County Times and posters issued in Castle Caereinion indicating where the information could be accessed. Part of the discussion with the school was that the community was aware of the consultation.</p> <p>There were some responses from parents but many as well from members of community.</p> <p>The number of responses were proportionate to the size of the school.</p>
<p>Are we just noting the cost per pupil at this school. The cost per pupil in the school is over £6000 which is not surprising. The average cost per pupil in Powys is over £4264 where it was around £3800 previously. Why has this increased so much and is it due to grants received by the Council.</p>	<p>£4000 is the figure for 2021-22. £3000 was the cost for the previous year.</p> <p>The figure has increased significantly for a number of reasons including the Council's contribution and the grants that the Council has received.</p>
<p>Has the expenditure for small schools increased also as they have received these grants</p>	<p>Yes but grants relate to the number of pupils so this would not make a difference for a small school such as this by comparison to Powys as a whole.</p>
<p>Is this a trend that you would expect to see continuing i.e. pupil funding for Powys nearer to the average. Is this closing of the gap due to covid and additional grants and would you expect this to continue.</p>	<p>This is difficult to answer as it depends on many factors. Funding per pupil is through the formula and that depends on pupil numbers. If a school's numbers fall then the budget per pupil increases. However, there is a basic level of funding which the school needs and is provided by the formula which is why small schools cost more than larger schools.</p>
<p>In the preferred option, the revenue saving to Council is one reason for closure. Where does money from closing of school go, back to the school service or into the overall</p>	<p>This is about how the Council manages its overall budget. Any savings from school transformation are not ring fenced. Education spend is probably the most significant spend</p>

<p>corporate budget.</p>	<p>in the overall Council budget. However, in terms of the Council's priorities, Education is a high priority and therefore is provided with a proportionate level of funding. There is a process for the Council to allocate the budget. It is not possible or desirable to ring fence funding for education but it understood that it is a high priority for the Council. That approach has seen the additional investment in education over the last few years.</p>
<p>In relation to School Transport if a parent chose to send their child to another Church in Wales / faith school the nearest would be at Welshpool. However, this would not qualify for free school transport. Is the Council aware of a recent judicial review against Swansea Council (to do with transport to faith schools) which meant it had to change its policy. Is the Council aware of the case and has taken it into consideration.</p>	<p>That is correct. The Council is aware of the case and has taken legal advice. In terms of the School Organisation Code, if the Council is removing a faith provision it has to make sure that other faith schools are available in area which it is in Welshpool. The school transport policy does state that transport will not be provided to denominational schools. The issue here is whether parents have chosen this school as it is a faith school or as the local school. Until decision to close gone through Council will not know which schools parents will chose for their children. There is an appeals process for school transport as well. Current policy is not to provide transport to faith schools.</p>
<p>Can parents put their case forward if parents want children to go to faith schools. Do not want affordability to be a factor.</p>	<p>Anyone who is refused transport can appeal irrespective of reasons.</p>
<p>The proposal is looking at an individual school and not looking at schools as a whole as a coherent plan. When the vision was outlined in Pavilion, officers and heads were present from all through schools and this seemed to be the way forward. However, this vision is not in any of the options for this school. Why has there been a change in direction</p>	<p>This has not been a change in direction. The strategy approved last year stated that the strategic aim is to improve learner entitlement. There are two objectives within that namely to establish a network of all through schools and to rationalise and reconfigure primary provision. Different approaches have been undertaken in different areas for different reasons. The reason that there has not been an area review here is that there are a number of</p>

	<p>things happening in the Llanfair Caereinion catchment. A number of developments have already happened in the catchment. The catchment is complex in terms of the different types of schools in the catchment. There are a number of things that need to happen in a phased way. Once the all through school is established there is a language component which needs to be worked through as well. These all need to happen first before an area review. Area reviews can take time to implement and there are a number of small schools in the catchment and these need to be addressed.</p>
<p>Are there any particular lessons learned from this particular consultation exercise for use in more complex consultations. Estyn has supported that most of the options here are properly identified.</p>	<p>There is a need to do a lessons learned exercise. There is a need to explore further the informal consultation process before formulating proposals for a formal consultation.</p>

Appendix B

<p>Page 21 - Estyn broadly supportive, but does challenge around access for pupils from low income and economically deprived backgrounds. How will the Council deal with wider issues such as extra curricular activities in relation to school transport.</p>	<p>This is raised often when schools proposed for closure especially rural schools. It relates to pupils having to rely on home to school transport where previously they did not, and whether that constrains them from attending after school activities.</p> <p>There is no easy answer for the Council and this is probably issue for schools themselves. Most of the schools where pupils from this school would transfer are rural schools. Those schools are experienced in providing a range of extra curricular activities used to organising activities for pupils including those who use home to school transport.</p> <p>Next year the curriculum will be continuing but also changing (from September 2022). Schools will need to design their curriculum to suit their learners and the four purposes and are required to consider activities including extra curricular activities which do happen during the school day.</p>
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<p>Due to the feedback in the report it could be expected that there had been clarification with receiving schools that these activities could be undertaken. This could be fed back to allay parents' fears as a response to the comments.</p>	<p>The information comes from the challenge advisers who work with the schools. The Council is therefore aware that these schools can provide these extra curricular activities.</p>
<p>From the comments received it appears as if the school is already moving to teach the new curriculum. However, Officers have questioned whether the school can deliver the new curriculum because of its size. Can this be clarified.</p>	<p>All schools are working towards delivering the new curriculum. However, in smaller schools with fewer qualified teachers it will be difficult to design the curriculum, and there needs to be an expertise across the teaching staff to deliver the six areas of learning. In larger schools you will have greater expertise and also in specific areas. It is effective teaching which improves learner outcomes. If the same teacher teaches pupils for example for a number of years and there are gaps in the teacher's expertise this can have an effect on pupils.</p> <p>Teachers in small schools will need to plan over those four age ranges, but is not just the age groups but also pupils' ability ranges.</p> <p>Staff need to understand learner progression and progression steps and this will come through professional learning etc. In larger schools practitioners can learn from each other and share information which is more challenging for two teacher schools. Also, in larger schools they can have more experienced practitioners to undertake a range of extra curricular activities which are a challenge for small schools.</p>
<p>We have many small schools in Powys who are already developing the new curriculum, Castle Caereinion being one of them. How are we monitoring how small schools are being able to deliver the curriculum. Can this information be shared with others who have not developed as far on the path.</p>	<p>There is a key document published by Estyn and Welsh Government called "The Journey to 2022" which sets out the steps and expectations for schools. All schools are preparing for the implementation in 2022. The important factor is the preparation, design and delivery of the curriculum. A mixed age class is a challenge where the approach needs to be constantly flexible and adaptable to ensure that</p>

	<p>teaching is suitable for age groups and abilities. Sustaining that is an additional workload for teachers in small schools as they have additional roles and leadership responsibilities. In larger schools there is greater opportunity for career progression and leadership opportunities for staff. Planning and designing the curriculum is the responsibility of teachers not support staff.</p> <p>Low pupil numbers can impact on effective collaboration for pupils. There is strong emphasis in the new curriculum about peer tutoring, to support or enhance normal teaching. Pupils learn more when they teach others and for this to happen you need higher pupil number and a range of abilities in the class.</p>
<p>What size of school do we need to deliver the benefits of the new curriculum</p>	<p>The new curriculum has six areas of learning and experience. All schools are working to deliver this from September 2022. In considering the workload, there would be a need for a lead person for each of the six areas of learning as there is significant work for each area. Therefore, the size of the school would need to be large enough to provide for a person for each area of learning.</p> <p>The former curriculum was more content based whilst the new curriculum is about designing the curriculum in the school, planning it and supporting other teachers who do not have the experience in this area.</p> <p>Also, the ALN (Additional Learning Needs) Act 2021 provides a significant leadership for an ALNCo (Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator), so this is an additional role for schools going forward.</p>
<p>Breakfast clubs – all these pupils will be reliant on home to school transport. Will pupils be able to access a breakfast club in the new school as some pupils are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.</p>	<p>All the schools in this area are able to provide breakfast, even if they require transport. They can also access breakfasts if they are eligible for free schools meals</p>

<p>School building condition. A new condition survey was undertaken. However it is not included in the documentation</p>	<p>The reason the new survey (2020) is not included is that the others schools have not had an updated condition survey (previous surveys were 2009) so it would not be comparing like with like.</p>
<p>As part of justification for closure it is stated that the school's condition has deteriorated but we do not know if condition of others has deteriorated as well. Should the updated survey not be included in the report</p>	<p>This is purely down to fairness and as the other schools have not had a revised survey the 2009 surveys have been used for comparison. However the recent condition survey was referenced for completeness.</p> <p>The Portfolio Holder advised that the school condition would have deteriorated and if it were to be retained it would require significant work and cost to bring it up to the required condition.</p>
<p>Modifications at the school to improve disability access, particularly for a pupil. Do the other schools where this pupil might attend have the same level of facilities, and do other schools in the area have the same level of support and facilities for pupils with physical or ALN related disabilities.</p> <p>It is reassuring that it is parental choice which drives the need rather than the availability of facilities.</p>	<p>In relation to the individual pupil, should the school closes, the Council will need to liaise with the parents and school to understand the specific needs of the pupil and then assess what adaptations are required for the receiving school. The Council has a duty to ensure that all its school buildings are DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) compliant. The Council would need to ensure that facilities were available at whichever school was selected by a pupil with a disability.</p>
<p>There is concern that low income families who want faith provision may not be able to access this purely due to income and cost of home to school transport. There is an issue about low income families when the Council is looking at school transformation.</p>	<p>This is recognised as an issue for this school. In terms of the curriculum offer, in church schools there is currently a fourth core subject namely religious education. In relation to the curriculum review there is a current consultation on religious education. Should the school close, it will be interesting to see how many of the parents select an alternative because it is a faith school for their children or if it is their local school.</p>
<p>Would the right of appeal in relation to home to school transport be explained to</p>	<p>Yes if the decision is to close the school, then this discussion can be had with parents.</p>

<p>parents</p>	
<p>There is conflicting information about how many pupils walk to school, and no information about how many pupils attending the school are from within or outside the catchment. In addition, how many pupils from within the catchment attend schools outside the catchment.</p>	<p>Information from where pupils come from is in the Impact Assessment. This can be provided to the Committee or presented to the Cabinet. The information on the numbers of pupils walking to school would need to be obtained and provided for the Cabinet.</p>
<p>If all the pupils transferred to Berriew school as the receiving school there would not be enough space. Forty houses being built in catchment which suggests that there could be between 17 and 24 additional pupils of which around ten could be of primary age coming into the area. Can Berriew school take on all these numbers. The potential new pupil numbers from the new properties are not included in Impact Assessment.</p>	<p>In terms of capacity there are surplus places in Berriew and the Council has checked the likely intake for next year, so it is known that the school does have places available. It is recognised that not all of the Castle Caereinion pupils can be accommodated at Berriew. However, there are enough spare spaces in all the neighbouring schools. Decisions are also already being made by parents about moving pupils to certain schools. Parents during school reorganisations tend to chose different schools for their children rather than move them all as a block. The Council has moved away from the practice of having a main receiving school. In relation to forecasts of pupil numbers the school organisation code requires the Authority to publish five year predictions based on PLASC (Pupil Level Annual School Census) information. The Authority also uses finance count figures for more accurate forecasting i.e. the next three years' figures obtained from schools to set budgets. The Authority is aware that there are housing developments, but there is a warning on using housing developments to predict future pupil numbers so the Authority tends not to use those. However, if those housing developments did produce children then this school would still be a small school.</p>
<p>The concern is about Berriew</p>	<p>The Council has a duty to review pupil</p>

<p>school with increasing numbers and increasing numbers of housing developments there then the school may be full in two or three years.</p>	<p>numbers and the capacity of its schools. If a school is full to capacity then the Council would need to address that.</p>
<p>Does the Authority know where pupils live, and are they closer to Berriew, Welshpool or Guilsfield.</p>	<p>In the Community Impact Assessment it shows which would be the closest school if Castle Caereinion was closed. Berriew is the closest school for 70% of pupils, Welshpool 12%, Guilsfield 8%, Llanfair Caereinion and Llanidloes 4%.</p>
<p>Closing the school could probably mean closing the community centre. What is the plan to support the pre-school age group and is there a concern about the viability of the community, given the numbers of activities linked to the church and the school.</p>	<p>There are concerns expressed about the viability of the community centre. The community centre is well used and the school is a main contributor to the finances of the community centre. If the school closes it would be the diocese who would be responsible for the building. The Council's response to the concerns raised is that should the school close, the management committee would need to consider how best to keep the community centre viable. The Portfolio Holder suggested that the community centre group could be directed to the Community Council for possibly precept funding.</p>
<p>There is a need to work with pupils to reassure them about changing schools. Officers also need to work with the community to remind them that it is people that make communities not buildings.</p>	<p>In relation to pupil wellbeing, if the proposal is accepted, the Service will support the school so that they can support the pupils, and to ensure a smooth transition.</p>

Comments:

- Agree with the comments from officers. These arguments will be pertinent for discussions on dual stream schools in future. Hopefully these arguments will be as strong to move dual streams schools along the language continuum in future. Is the only place for a dual stream school in future where a new dual stream school is being created and existing dual stream schools will need to move along the language continuum.
- There are enormous advantages of a larger school, including pupils learning from each other in a class. Experience of transforming schools in Ystradgynlais has demonstrated that there are many advantages and improvements for pupils. Each pupil should have a similar amount spent on them.

- There is a strong faith based ethos which links the school and the wider community. There is concern about the impact on the community of breaking this link and whether the proposal does not cause a significant detriment to the community.

Cllr Sandra Davies left the meeting at 3.49 p.m.

Cllr Michael Williams left the meeting at 4.00 p.m.

Impact Assessments:

<p>In the Community Impact Assessment where pupils in the catchment are going to school needs to be included as a standard item in future Community Impact Assessments. In relation to the Playgroup, what support can be given to the playgroup.</p> <p>It might be helpful to have information regarding the impact on settings in any future Community Impact Assessments.</p> <p>In respect of pupils from poorer backgrounds is there anything else to be explored. How will pupils eligible for free school meals be supported.</p>	<p>A response has already been provided.</p> <p>This is a non-funded playgroup which does not meet every day of the week. The playgroup is not funded by the Early Years team as it does not provide ten hours of provision. The Authority does not have any information available about this setting.</p> <p>All schools in the area have PDG grant funding which is allocated per pupil. The PDG plan is monitored across the authority to ensure that all pupils eligible for free school meals are catered for appropriately at their schools.</p>
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Scrutiny made the following observations:

- The Committee concluded that the proposal set out a strong case for change.
- The Committee expressed concern regarding:
 - the impact of the proposal if approved on the future operation of other community assets such as the community centre and the pre-school playgroup.
 - the ability of children of low income families to be able to access faith schools in accordance with parental choice following the closure of their current school where they were not eligible for free home to school transport.
- The Committee received assurances in respect of:
 - the publication of the consultation exercise in the press and by posters in the community, and the provision of paper copies on request.
 - the proposal having adhered to the provisions of rural schools policy.
 - the continued provision of extra-curricular activities for pupils if they transferred to other schools in the area.
 - the continued provision of breakfast clubs for pupils transferring to other schools in the area.

- the provision of adaptations at a receiving school for any pupils with specific needs transferring schools as a result of the proposals.
- the ability of any parent whose children were not eligible for free school transport to the new school being able to make an appeal in accordance with the Council's transport appeals process.
- support being provided for the well-being of pupils transferred to other schools.
- The Committee noted the challenges in developing and delivering the new curriculum from 2022 especially for smaller schools.
- The Committee questioned whether the impact of the recent Judicial Review of Swansea Council in relation to home to school transport to faith schools would require a revision to the Council's home to school transport policy.
- The Committee suggested that for future Cabinet reports it would be helpful to know the numbers of pupils from the catchment that attended the school which was the subject of the proposal, and the numbers of pupils from the catchment who attended schools outside the catchment.
- The Committee asked for a reassurance that the Council would provide support to the Community Hall to enable it to adjust to the loss of income.

There were no Scrutiny Recommendations to the Cabinet.

5.	WORK PROGRAMME
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The Committee noted that future meetings would be held as follows:

14-07-21 14.00 - 16.00 Zoom	School Budgets 2021-22 School Budgets out-turn 2020-21 Poverty Report -
09-21 TBC	
15-09-21 14.00 – 16.00 Zoom	Mount Street / Cradoc (Cabinet 21-09-21) Llanbedr (Cabinet 21-09-21) Churchstoke (Cabinet 21-09-21)
08-12-21 14.00 - 16.00 Zoom	
12-01-22 14.00 - 16.00 Zoom	WESP - post consultation (Cabinet 18-01-22)

The Committee expressed concern about considering three proposals at the September meeting.

County Councillor P Roberts (Chairman)