

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LEARNING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT BY ZOOM ON THURSDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 2021

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

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

Officers: Lynette Lovell (Director of Education), Eurig Towns (Senior Challenge Advisor), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager and Head of Democratic Services), Marianne Evans (Senior Manager - Education Services), Emma Palmer (Head of Transformation and Communications), Hayley Smith (Interim Senior Manager; Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion) and Mari Thomas

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors C Mills, A Jenner. K Roberts-Jones and T Van-Rees (other Council business).

2. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members relating to items for consideration on the agenda.

3. DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP

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. LLANBEDR C.I.W SCHOOL

Documents Considered:

- Report of the Portfolio Holder for Education and Property – Llanbedr C.I.W. School

Issues Discussed:

- None

Questions:

Could you clarify the capacity and number of vacancies in each of the potential Powys receiving schools which are available and can you clarify whether these spaces are in Years 1 to 6.	Crickhowell has a capacity of 230 and has 41 available places; Llangattock has a 121 place capacity and has 18 available places; Llangynidr has a capacity of 147 and has 35 available spaces
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	<p>These schools are in the same cluster as Llanbedr.</p> <p>Llangorse would be closer for some Llanbedr pupils but is full at present.</p> <p>In terms of how the schools structure their classes: Crickhowell has 7 classes and 8 classrooms Llangynidr has 4 classes in 5 classrooms Llangattock has 4 classrooms all of which are used.</p>
<p>This suggests that there are enough spaces to move pupils into from Llanbedr</p>	<p>Overall in the catchment there is sufficient capacity to take the pupils from Llanbedr. Looking at the projections, there is increased capacity in future due to numbers of pupils at schools decreasing, with 91 current places available but projected to be 141 by 2023.</p>
<p>It has been raised about the desire to move children from one Church in Wales (CIW) school to make room in another CIW school. What is the legal position and what are the likely numbers moving from this school to another CIW school</p>	<p>Llangattock is the only CIW school in the cluster apart from Llanbedr. There was an error in the Llanbedr capacity calculation reported to Welsh Government on the Council's annual return. The original capacity reported and published in the consultation document was 144 but in fact it is 121 so an addendum was circulated to stakeholders who had received the consultation document. There is insufficient capacity in Llangattock for all of the pupils from Llanbedr.</p> <p>In relation to the School Organisation code the authority should provide the same kind of places for Welsh Medium or faith schools, but there is no requirement to provide a like for like provision. Parents can apply for any school and if a parent wants to choose a CIW place and there is a space in Llangattock the Council under its transport policy would not provide home to school transport to a faith school, but can use discretionary powers on a case by case basis for</p>

	<p>those pupils in Llanbedr school.</p> <p>The figures provided are based on current figures. However, whilst Llangattock may not have the CIW capacity today, 28 pupils are in years 5 and 6 so by the time Llanbedr closed some of the current pupils will have moved to secondary school so there may be vacant places.</p> <p>There is also an assumption that all pupils attending Llanbedr are doing so because it is a CIW School, and to receive a faith provision. However, this may not be the case.</p> <p>In Year 6 in Llangorse which is currently full, there are 20 pupils who will transition to secondary school. There are 28 pupils in Years 5 and 6 at Llangattock. This does not account for any pupils entering the school from reception classes.</p> <p>In addition, there has been a decrease in numbers generally and this is a trend which is projected to continue.</p>
<p>Llangorse is full. Is there a school in Brecon which would be the nearest CIW school.</p>	<p>There is a school in Brecon but the closest would be Llangorse. Llangorse is full this year but may not be next year. Priory School in Brecon would be closest one and another one in Abergavenny. Priory and Abergavenny schools are close to capacity currently.</p>
<p>Of those selecting a faith provision currently only 25% can carry this forward in a new school and does not sit well in terms of equality as faith is a protected characteristic.</p>	<p>Faith is a protected characteristic but the authority would use discretionary powers in relation to transport should any pupils wish to go to a CIW school.</p>
<p>Would the discretionary transport provision apply to younger siblings of pupils not currently in this school.</p>	<p>In accordance with the admissions policy, when a child is at a school, siblings following them are considered on own merit but if there's no space in the school then the over-subscription criteria kicks in and having a sibling at the school already is a priority criteria for allocating a space.</p>

<p>Would they get transport to that school.</p>	<p>They would be eligible for transport to their closest school and the authority could use its discretionary powers for transport to a faith school further away.</p>
<p>If an older sibling is getting transport to another faith school, would a younger sibling also get transport to that school.</p>	<p>Transport will only be provided to a CIW school for those pupils currently in Llanbedr should the proposal go forward. Siblings would be looked at through the appeals process on a case by case basis.</p> <p>A commitment was given that if any parent wishes for their children to access a CIW provision if Llanbedr closes, then the Council would consider using its discretionary powers to provide home to school transport on a case by case basis. That would only apply to pupils currently at Llanbedr School.</p> <p>If transport is granted to current pupils, for siblings these would be considered through the appeals process on a case by case basis.</p>
<p>Whilst some pupils may have left schools leaving capacity in those possible receiving schools over the next few years, schools will have their own intake from the area. What has been the pupil numbers in the past 10 years.</p>	<p>There are over 90 places available at present. By 2023 it will be over 140 so there will be additional capacity.</p> <p>Historically pupil numbers at Llanbedr have been around 40 pupils. Currently with 49 pupils, this is the highest number ever for the school.</p> <p>The general trend is downwards and has been the same since 2014. Crickhowell numbers have reduced since 2014 with Llangynidr and Llangattock remaining moderately stable.</p>
<p>Where do the children actually come from to Llanbedr school.</p>	<p>A spreadsheet was sent to Members which shows chosen versus closest school. It shows that many people choosing schools which are not their closest schools. In terms of Llanbedr, 38% of pupils attend the school as the closest school. Around 61% of pupils live closer to other schools. If Llanbedr school was to close 61% of pupils would be</p>

	<p>closer to Crickhowell School, 13% to Deri View, Abergavenny, 11% closest to Llangynidr, 9% closest to Llangattock, 1.9% closest to Llangorse and another out of county school.</p>
<p>In terms of numbers the figures are based on an assumption that it is likely there will be less pupils coming into Year 1 in the local schools than leaving from year 6. What are the projections for year 1 numbers.</p>	<p>The Council tends to project based on actual figures previously. There is a greater certainty in considering numbers of pupils transitioning from primary to secondary schools. Projections are available on the PLASC information and these can be used to show specific projections for the Crickhowell area.</p>
<p>It is the evidence behind the report which is troubling. Smaller rural schools are being closed due to cost and not educational excellence. This school is an outlier in terms of cost per pupil.</p> <p>How are the evaluation criteria ranked as the sole driver here is cost. In the consultation report there was a lack of evidence provided to teachers and pupils to support the closure proposal.</p> <p>It is argued that the additional cost of supporting small schools makes the provision inequitable across Powys. No evidence to support closure around class sizes and leadership.</p> <p>Are the numbers quoted in the report correct. A letter to the Chair indicates that there are currently 55 pupils attending the school and 4 more pupils due to start after Christmas. Can you confirm the numbers and the adjusted cost per pupil. What impact does this have on the suggested £101,000 saving.</p> <p>What is the average cost per pupil of all the small schools in Powys i.e. those under 91 pupils, not all schools in Powys.</p> <p>The Chair referred to the different strands in the questions namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small schools and education standards / ability 	<p>Numbers: In the papers there was an error around current pupil numbers which was clarified to the Chair of the Committee. As of today there are 49 pupils in total at the school, of which 4 are nursery pupils. The school is expecting another 5 pupils in this academic year which would increase pupil numbers to 54. The capacity of the school is 57 so with these additional pupils the school would be close to capacity.</p> <p>Finance: As pupil numbers increase funding may not increase due to the current formula as it funds in steps of classes of 30. The costs per pupil would reduce to around £4320 which is closer to Powys average.</p> <p>The cost of a school is one factor, as set out in the challenges facing the school as is low pupil numbers Leadership is a challenge as the headteacher has significant teaching responsibilities, and mixed age classes is another factor. When the future of schools are considered all these issues are considered.</p> <p>This school was not identified as a priority in terms of cost. From a strategic perspective there are a number of things which need to be unlocked across the county to</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costs • Actual pupil numbers <p>£4320 per pupil makes Llanbedr the 46th most expensive school which makes a substantive difference because of the steps. Ysgol Cwm Banw is 8th most expensive school which was created during this Council term. This places this school almost in the centre of the cost for primary schools.</p> <p>This increase in pupil numbers is a game changer in terms of cost.</p>	<p>deliver the transformation programme. As an organisation the Council signed up to strategy developed following extensive consultation across the school community. We have to focus on the future and provide a 21st century education rather than protecting the past infrastructure. There are variables and complexities across the county and these cannot be tackled together, as this is a ten year programme. There will be no areas left untouched and you have to start somewhere.</p>
<p>Small schools can provide pupils with a good experience if you have good staff. However, you have to design a school system which is good for average members of staff not just brilliant staff and scale gives more flexibility and robustness with school organisation.</p> <p>If these additional pupils are coming into the school at nursery level are comparing like with like as if nursery figures were added to school figures this would change the Powys average.</p>	<p>That is correct. If the nursery figures for other Powys schools were added the average figure would change. However, Powys does not fund nursery places.</p>
<p>It has been indicated that a cluster review is scheduled in wave two. If this school closes pupils will move to another school. Potentially those pupils could be moved again following an area review. What is the educational impact of such moves on those pupils. Should we not be looking at this as a cluster as its only four schools in the cluster rather than a single school and then the remainder in a cluster.</p>	<p>We have signed up to a strategy to transform the whole of the county and part of that strategy is the commitment to 13 localities. The vision is to develop all age schools in all 13 localities. All catchments will be reviewed in time. Crickhowell is due for review in wave two of the programme in 2022. From experience, area reviews can take a long time to complete. Improving the schools estate is part of that. To address some of the issues about equity we need to look at the smaller schools earlier in the process.</p> <p>In terms of the risk for pupils having to move twice, a guarantee cannot be given that any pupil in any school will not be affected by a</p>

reorganisation proposal. The authority tries to ensure that pupils do not have to move more than once in their school life, but that cannot be guaranteed.

The transition to other schools following closure from experience is very effective and pupils settle well in other schools.

The new curriculum is to start in 2022. Schools are currently developing their vision for the curriculum and designing the curriculum. The curriculum will be bespoke for every school and will require significant professional learning for teachers.

The authority is not saying that the curriculum cannot be delivered in smaller schools, and it will support all schools in delivering the curriculum. However, the professional judgement of officers (who have been teachers) is that to plan for the curriculum the more staff and expertise you have the more effective that curriculum planning can be. In smaller schools you have lesser numbers to undertake the role of planning the curriculum. The current curriculum is prescriptive but the new one will be bespoke and designed. The leadership in small schools will have a larger challenge and will need more support and it will cause an increase in workload for staff.

The current Head is a curriculum lead and has been instrumental in her wider leadership within the cluster as well as being a challenge adviser.

The new curriculum has to be designed at each school which is a larger workload for schools. There are six areas of learning and experience in the new curriculum,

	<p>on the four core purposes which are weighty subject areas.</p> <p>The evidence which is available from teaching and learning through the Education Endowment Foundation clearly shows that small classes or schools are not a major factor when it comes to effective teaching and learning. The factors which are important are high aspirations and high level questioning which shows that effective teaching and learning are key.</p>
<p>The document does not give the evidence that is implied that it does. Page 4 talks about the aspirations which are accepted.</p> <p>However, you cannot find where it states in this document that this school is not delivering the curriculum. The Estyn inspection states that all areas are good except standards and teaching which are adequate in this school. This Head is also leading other schools in the cluster so there are no issues about the quality and capability of the Head.</p> <p>The financial aspect is a challenge for the Council. Is the money saved going back into the school service.</p>	<p>With regard to the Estyn report the current head was not in post at the time of the inspection.</p> <p>There are no issues about leadership at the school but it is that one person who has to bear the load and schools can not just rely on one person.</p> <p>Overall the financial envelope for education in Powys is sufficient by comparison to Wales, and Powys is above the Welsh average in terms of funding. The issue is the equity of funding per pupil, and that the current infrastructure is set up for 18th century education not 21st century. We need to use the availability of 21st Century funding to support the new curriculum. ONS (Office of National Statistics) statistics shows a decline in the number of pupils attending Powys schools.</p> <p>In the consultation report we try to articulate what the Director was explaining about the educational aspects starting at section 1.3.1. This does explain why the educational aspects are important and the benefits of larger schools, non mixed classes etc.</p>
<p>What is missing in this strategy is that there is no consideration of</p>	<p>In the WESP the Crickhowell area has been identified as area for the</p>

<p>Welsh Medium opportunities for children in these areas. Where is the short, medium and long term future strategy for children to develop bilingual skills in Powys.</p> <p>The WESP identifies the Crickhowell area as a challenging area. Is there a potential here for Llanbedr to provide an opportunity for Welsh Medium provision in the area.</p>	<p>development of Welsh Medium provision. Currently there is no Welsh Medium or dual stream provision or a Cylch Ti a Fi or a Cylch Meithrin in the cluster.</p> <p>It is too early at the moment to identify what the provision might be in the cluster. There is a need to develop the early years provision first, and look at where are the areas of critical mass, probably centred on towns.</p> <p>This area is a priority in first 5 years of the WESP. Developments over the border in terms of Welsh Medium in Abergavenny also need to be taken into account which could have an impact.</p>
<p>When looking at areas where you can create a critical mass, you would be seeking to establish a Cylch Meithrin in the Crickhowell catchment area.</p>	<p>Yes you need to look at where the centres of population are and start there and this is the approach local authorities take when looking at creating new provision as the authority wants to sustain the growth.</p>
<p>In relation to educational standards and small schools. It is not possible to say what the minimum size is for a school to deliver the curriculum. The Committee has also been told that there is a need for a teacher for each area of excellence when developing the curriculum. Does this mean needing six teaching staff for each school to deliver the curriculum.</p>	<p>Ideally you would want one teacher responsible for every area of teaching of learning which is six teachers. A teaching assistant cannot be responsible for an area of teaching and learning.</p> <p>With the current curriculum in small schools teachers have to produce schemes of work for multiple subject areas. In larger schools these responsibilities can be shared and also opportunities for progression of staff.</p> <p>In Llanbedr with 2.5 teachers (including the head who has a teaching responsibility) it is likely that each teacher would have 2 or 3 areas of learning and experience each. Therefore, having five or six staff to develop these areas is beneficial due to the workload and also in terms of the development of teachers. There are 37 primary schools in Powys which have six</p>

	<p>teachers or more, and 11 with 3 or less teachers. The authority is not saying that developing the new curriculum cannot be done in small schools but the amount of work to prepare and design the areas of learning and experience, and assessing progress is significant. Smaller schools will also need additional support and more cluster working.</p>
<p>Looking at the comments from officers and staff at the school meetings, it appears to suggest that this school could meet the challenge of developing the curriculum. There are also comments in the document about the breadth of after school activities.</p> <p>With all of the praise for the school is this a school that can meet this challenge working with other schools in the cluster.</p>	<p>We cannot say that. The delivery of the curriculum will have to be worked on in the next year. The transformation strategy also sets out the learner entitlement that the Authority wants to establish.</p> <p>Evidence shows that for more able children the more teacher subject knowledge and expertise there is the better those children do.</p> <p>For after school activities, and the broader experience the more experience you have to call on the better.</p>
<p>It is difficult to say whether the curriculum can be delivered or not at this school. There are 11 schools with less than 3 teachers and generally the view is that these will struggle to deliver the curriculum.</p>	<p>There are a number of small schools. Yes, it will be a challenge to deliver the curriculum. When each catchment is being looked at, there are a number of factors which need to be taken into account not only curriculum and size, but local factors such as geographic location language, accessibility. For every school each individual circumstance has to be looked at on a case by case basis, rather than a blanket approach when considering small schools.</p>
<p>The Community Impact Assessment has some negative impacts without much mitigation. If the closure goes ahead will there be significant support provided for the community.</p> <p>In future could there be comments from other departments as to what support could be provided for the community.</p>	<p>Mitigating against a negative community impact for a school closure will need a Council wide approach rather than just an Education Service approach, and this is something the Council would want to look at if the proposal is approved.</p>

- **Comments:**
 - This proposal does revolve around finance and the amount spent per pupil currently is not equitable across Powys. This is just not about buildings but the future of children.
 - The strategy has been set and questions raised are those looked at when the strategy was developed. We are asking the same questions for each school. Process is repetitive if we do not follow the strategy.

Scrutiny made the following observations:

- The Committee did not accept:
 - that the argument that having taken into account Year 5 and 6 pupils moving to secondary education and the potential numbers being accepted from nursery provision, that there were sufficient spaces in other schools to accept those pupils who wished to continue a faith based education should Llanbedr School close. In light of this the Committee felt that the "neutral" impact in the Impact Assessment was incorrect and should be amended.
 - That the financial argument was not robust due to the potential increase in the pupil numbers during the academic year as discussed at the meeting which would bring the school closer to its capacity and reduce the costs per pupil towards the Powys average cost per pupil.
- The Committee accepted that schools with small numbers of pupils and staff, presented a potential risk that elements of the new curriculum might not be deliverable and may require additional support. However, it is difficult to assess this fully as the new curriculum is not yet fully developed, and there is no definitive evidence. The Committee also suggested that as the current headteacher at Llanbedr school led the cluster in relation to the development of the curriculum the school was better placed in terms of its own curriculum development.
- The Committee was assured by the commitment given that should Llanbedr School close and a parent wishes for their children to access a faith provision, then the Council would consider using its discretionary powers to allow transport to that school, on a case by case basis, and that for siblings this could be considered by means of the appeals process.
- The Committee did not feel that as there were only four schools in the cluster that the potential for the development of a Welsh Language provision in the cluster had been fully explored. The potential for federating this school with others in the cluster was not included in the report and therefore not considered by scrutiny.
- The Committee felt on balance that there were more arguments in favour of retaining the school despite a number of arguments to support the proposed closure.
- The Community suggested that in future consultation reports where there was an impact on community facilities, that other Council services be asked to comment on what potential support the Council might be able to provide those facilities should the school close.

Members of the Committee also commented that:

- these proposals do revolve around finance as the amount spent per pupil across Powys is not equitable. The proposals are also not about buildings, but the future of children and the Council needs to have pace in its change programme.

- the Strategy for Transformation had been agreed by the Council and that it needed to be followed. Scrutiny's questions were raising issues which were highlighted when the strategy was developed.

There were no recommendations from scrutiny to the Cabinet.

5.	WORK PROGRAMME
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The Committee noted that future meetings of the Committee were scheduled as follows:

08-12-21 14.00 - 16.00 Zoom	Update on the North Powys Well-Being Programme (1 hour) (PROV)
24-01-22 14.00 - 16.00 Zoom	Q3 Performance and Risk
01-02-22	Draft Budget
02-03-22	
29-06-22	
20-07-22	Q1 Performance and Risk
21-09-22	
26-10-22	Q2 Performance and Risk
14-12-22	

County Councillor P Roberts (Chairman)