

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LEARNING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE HELD AT BY ZOOM ON WEDNESDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER 2022**

PRESENT: County Councillor R G Thomas (Chair)  
County Councillors A W Davies, B Davies, G D Jones, A Kennerley, C Kenyon-Wade,  
I McIntosh, DW Meredith, L Roberts, L Rijnenberg, J Brignell-Thorp, and D Bebb,  
Co-Opted Members: K Chedgzoy, S. Davies and M Evitts

Cabinet Portfolio Holders In Attendance: County Councillors P Roberts (Cabinet Member for a Learning Powys) and D Selby (Cabinet Member for a More Prosperous Powys)

Officers: Georgie Bevan (Head of Education), Caroline Turner (Chief Executive), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager and Head of Democratic Services), Marianne Evans (Senior Manager - Education Services), Emma Palmer (Director of Corporate Services), Jenny Ashton (Interim Head of Community Services) and James Chappelle (Capital and Financial Planning Accountant)

<b>1. APOLOGIES</b>
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Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor G Morgan and County Councillor D Thomas (Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation) and from Lynette Lovell (Director of Education and Children)

<b>2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR</b>
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RESOLVED that County Councillor Gareth D Jones be elected Vice-Chair for the ensuing year.

<b>3. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST</b>
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There were no declarations of interest from Members relating to items for consideration on the agenda.

<b>4. 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>5. TRANSFORMING EDUCATION PROGRAMME - YSGOL BRO HYDDGEN CAPITAL PROJECT</b>
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**Documents Considered:**

- Report of the Cabinet Member for a Learning Powys.

**Issues Discussed:**

- The paper was the strategic outline business case for the revised plans for Bro Hyddgen School, Machynlleth and detailed the preferred way forward following a review.

- Plans have been in place for some time to create a community school to include a leisure centre and library. However, the costs for all these elements on the site were too high for this to be progressed.
- Questions:

**Leisure:**

Question	Response
<p>Is there any idea of where the £6m would come from to undertake the repairs to the leisure centre, including the backlog. Does this figure reflect the current position regarding escalating costs.</p>	<p>Cabinet Member Response: £6m is the cost of a complete rebuild of the centre. What has currently been considered is the cost of maintaining the current centre to an acceptable standard for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.</p> <p>Officer Response: The plans were to co-locate the centre on the new campus. If the leisure provision is to remain in the existing location, capital has not been spent on the building in the last two to three years and there is a need for upgrading some elements to an acceptable standard such as the roof, some structural work, heating, mechanical and electrical work. To make those improvements would be approximately £1m to £1.2m which needs to be found from the capital budget.</p>
<p>Where will money come from. There was also a figure of £3.5m for the maintenance of the centre in the report for the next ten years as well.  There is also a figure of £55k to bring the centre up to a standard in the report.</p>	<p>Officer Response: The figure of £3.5m has been estimated as the cost for next 10 years. However, there is a sum needed to bring the centre up to an acceptable standard in the next year. There would need to be a planned maintenance programme to ensure that fixtures and fittings were improved over time.</p> <p>Cabinet Member Response: This is a moving situation. What has been considered are different priorities delivered over different timescales. £1.5m is estimated as needed for immediate work to safeguard the future of the centre. Over a ten year period the centre needs to be maintained.</p>
<p>Where is the money coming to finance the upgrade</p>	<p>Cabinet Member Response: This would come out of the capital programme</p>
<p>It has been suggested that the library</p>	<p>Cabinet Member Response:</p>

<p>could be moving to become part of the campus in the future. What is the situation now and how quickly is this likely to happen, or is this still subject to discussion.</p>	<p>The figure of £55k in the report is for the maintenance of the town library. Discussions are ongoing about whether moving the library to the campus is the most appropriate way forward. The current library and its condition is being reviewed Have been looking at the condition of current library.</p> <p>Officer Response: The Council would like to engage with the residents of Machynlleth as to whether it is beneficial to move the town library. In terms of the design for the campus, there is space in the current plans which could be used for the library should that be the Cabinet decision.</p>
<p>If the space for the library is designed in the plan, what will it be used for if the library does not move there and is this an additional cost if the library is to stay where it is.</p>	<p>Officer Response: The design is at such an early stage that it could be refined to remove the space for the library.</p> <p>In the current design there is sufficient accommodation to move the library to the campus at a build cost of around £750k. If the library was not built on this site the space could be used by the school but the design team is being challenged to try to keep the costs as low as possible.</p>
<p>Would building a new leisure centre in ten years for £6m be a like for like replacement for the existing one with all the facilities as currently.</p>	<p>Officer Response: The estimate of £6m is based on current industry standards. It is not certain if this is based on an actual build in Machynlleth or a general cost estimate. There is currently no plans for a new build for the centre and these are approximate figures for a new centre.</p> <p>The £6.5m is an estimate for a major refurbishment of the centre without any detail of what that refurbishment would be. The figure is not related to a brand new build of a leisure centre.</p>
<p>By how many years would this extend the life of the centre. £3.5m makes the centre viable for another ten years. What is the difference in cost between options 9 and 10.</p>	<p>Officer Response: The current option for the school only is £48m, and the campus model is £66m. The campus scheme does not replicate everything in the current leisure centre. There has been consideration of shaving areas out of the campus model but this did not provide the savings</p>

	<p>required and took the project the over the threshold for the band B programme. The consideration was then the affordability of the scheme and whilst the Council cannot afford the campus model it needs a new school in Machynlleth.</p> <p>The design team developed the leisure facility broadly along the lines of what is provided by the existing leisure centre. Some of the items at the centre are not a high priority for Freedom Leisure, and the scheme was co-developed but also considered what could be physically fitted on the site. The preferred solution was costed and then paired back.</p>
<p>The Cabinet due to financial pressures were discussing mothballing some buildings and this building could be a candidate for that with the maintenance costs required. There would need to be assurances around mothballing this centre and whether it would ever open again.</p>	<p>Cabinet Member Response: The centre is not on the mothball list. The centre in financial terms is profitable and successful especially from the swimming side. What is being considered is how to enhance the current centre where it is located. There is also fashion in leisure and any refurbishment needs to be more flexible and take into account what people visiting that centre require such as fitness equipment rather than a squash court.</p>
<p>There is a large discrepancy between the cost of rebuilding the current centre and a smaller building within the campus. The report does talk about the purchase of additional land to make this feasible. It is important to remember that 65% of this would be funded by Welsh Government, 35% by the Council. This would make the new campus proposal better value for money.</p>	<p>Officer Response: We do not have the funding available to support the wider campus scheme within the band B funding currently. By taking the school only funding option this will give the Council approximately £5m funding left in band B. There also needs to be some flexibility in band B to cover other issues which may arise such as rising costs.</p>
<p>Now its changed to the SCLP (Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme) has the discussion about overlapping bands of expenditure been discussed with Welsh Government.</p>	<p>Officer Response: Welsh Government has advised that there will not be a band C but a rolling programme. Welsh Government has indicated that when Councils are ready to apply for funding then they can approach Welsh Government to see what they can do. There is also some flexibility on the Council having to complete 80% of its projects in band B before we can apply for further funding.</p>

	<p>As projects are progressing the council is nearing the 80% target so discussions will be held with Welsh Government in the next year or so.</p>
<p>Can Powys afford to run 13 leisure centres into the future or do we have to take a realistic view and deal with this as soon as we can.</p>	<p>Cabinet Member Response: The Cabinet is working on the budget currently and leisure centres are being hit hard by the increasing costs of utilities. The Cabinet has the intention of retaining leisure facilities across the County and keeping the library open in Machynlleth alongside a new school.</p> <p>Officer Response: Section 2.8 of the report sets out what is available in the current programme in terms of funding. It is clear that there is insufficient funding for everything, hence the modification to the project being proposed. If we use the band B funding for the leisure facility it reduces the Council's ability to build other schools elsewhere.</p> <p>When the Council discusses any amendments with Welsh Government there would be discussions about any funding being available for Net Zero which is considered on a scheme by scheme basis. What is important is that the Council honours the commitment to improving the school facilities in the area. Scrutiny needs to look at the value for money aspects of the scheme based on the current proposal which allows the town to have the new school built and allow some community usage on the site as well as upgrading the leisure facility.</p>
<p>It is understood that the boiler broke down this week so more maintenance is needed to keep the building going until a new building arrives. Will the 3G pitch for the school be full sized or a ¾ size pitch.</p>	<p>Officer Response: Further feasibility work has been undertaken on the design. At present, it is not possible to fit a full size 3G pitch as well as the library so it will be a ¾ size 3G pitch. If the library does not go ahead then a full size pitch can be provided.</p>
<p>Is there an option to purchase additional ground. Is this being considered.</p>	<p>Officer Response: Yes there is consideration of acquisition of land to the north of school to provide a grass pitch for the school.</p>

**Education:**

Ysgol Bro Hyddgen was created in 2014 as the first all through school in the County which includes the high school and primary school. In 2014 they were merged and have been operating on two sites. The scheme for an all age school started in 2017. Then there was the issue of the collapse of the Council’s contractor Dawnus. The Council also looked at including leisure facilities and the library on the site.

The school was a dual stream school and the previous administration following consultation moved it to become a Welsh Medium school which is on a phased basis over the next 11 to 12 years. The design needs to take account of an all age school which is moving to being a Welsh Medium school and also needs to accommodate the current dual stream provision. In addition there needs to be space for well-being and an ALN centre.

In looking at the costs the pupil projections were reviewed and it was realised that the previous provision would be too large so it was reduced from a 620 pupil school down to a 540 pupil school for both primary and secondary provision.

<p>This was the first all through school in Powys established in 2014. At the time there was limited research of the positive impact of all through schools. The Committee has been told previously that Swansea University was undertaking research on this matter. Has that research been published.</p>	<p>Officer Response: It is not know whether the Swansea University research has been published but Estyn has published a report on all through schools.</p>
<p>Concerned about numbers as the predicted numbers includes English medium pupils for some time in the secondary sector. How viable is it to have a sixth form in a school of this size as the cost of educating pupils in the sixth form in this school is higher than in other schools. Does this include post 16 as well.</p>	<p>Officer Response: The numbers in the sixth form this year is around 80. The school is the main provider of Welsh Medium A levels in this area. The strategic direction in accordance with the Transforming education Strategy is to maintain all the sixth forms at high schools but also develop the wider Chweched Powys Sixth management structure. The new model should enable the choice and quality of provision for learners.</p> <p>In terms of post 16 the Chweched Powys Sixth form is the main provision. The Bro Hyddgen sixth form is one of the County’s larger sixth forms. One of the school’s strengths is that it takes pupils from across the border, and the council is working closely with Ceredigion on post 16 provision.</p> <p>In terms of all through schools across Wales generally there is a national</p>

	<p>network, and the Council has begun pairing our all through school heads with experienced heads from other counties who have gone through the process. Part of the work going forward is to develop an all through schools vision and the strengths of this is continuity of learning for pupils as they go through the phases. There is the Welsh Medium element for Bro Hyddgen only currently in terms of numbers as the other two all through schools are currently dual stream with Bro Caereinion having recently being opened starting the process to transfer to Welsh Medium. Therefore these three schools are supporting each other in terms of process.</p>
<p>What are the average year numbers going through as it looks like 100% retention in the sixth form.</p>	<p>Officer Response:                  Within the numbers are those pupils coming in from across the border as well. In terms of the sixth form the school does retain a large number of their learners compared to other schools. One piece of work being undertaken this year as part of the Chweched Powys Sixth is vocational provision to make sure that the offer is available from September 2023.</p>
<p>With regard to the options available pre 16 as the numbers of pupils are small, is this impacting on the options available to pupils or the per pupil costs to maintain small classes.</p>	<p>Officer Response:                  This is built into the secondary funding formula due to the demography and rurality of Powys but it will impact if you do not have sufficient numbers of pupils to run A level or GCSE classes. Sometimes this means putting Welsh Medium and English Medium pupils together with the staff available to run the classes at those schools. However, the formula is designed to take account of smaller class sizes than would be in other counties.</p>
<p>Where is the sixth form based currently</p>	<p>Officer Response:                  It is based on the secondary school site. Canolfan Hyddgen is also used for study areas rather than pupils being based there.</p>
<p>Would Canolfan Hyddgen be declared surplus and sold off with the new school. Should this be determined when looking at the capital costs for the new build.</p>	<p>Officer Response:                  This will be considered and the Council's policy will be followed. The potential capital receipt will also be considered.</p>

<p>If Canolfan Hyddgen will be vacated when new build comes, will the primary site be vacant as well and be declared surplus. Would the Canolfan Hyddgen building be suitable for a Canolfan Trochi for that area as it is a new building designed for educational purposes.</p> <p>It appears that the sixth form is one of Bro Hyddgen's strengths attracting students from other counties and is also the only location providing Welsh Medium subjects for Chweched Powys Sixth. There is a difficulty in recruiting Welsh Language teachers but the Council also needs to do more to support this for the future.</p>	<p>Officer Response: There have been discussions previously about Canolfan Hyddgen becoming a Welsh Language centre for the area, and any options can be considered currently. There will also be spaces in the new school for immersion provision.</p> <p>The Council has been looking at Welsh Medium subject support for the school this week. We do have access to expertise through the Mid Wales Educational Partnership which allows access to Ceredigion staff who are bilingual. All the staff at Bro Hyddgen are bilingual and the school is committed to the language development and support of staff. The school also has access to its own primary and secondary specialist school improvement advisers as it becomes an all through school and develops its vision.</p>
<p>Looking at the case for change, one of the elements is to further improve the transition between all key stages. The target is for all lessons / observations to be rated as excellent within eighteen months of new school opening. As the school has been an all through school for some time, how close to achieving the target is the school now. There needs to be a base line against which to measure the improvement.</p>	<p>Officer Response: There have been visits to all secondary schools during the summer to capture the base line due to the impact Covid has had. There was a conversation with the school about their self evaluation evidence which looked at their strengths and areas of development for that school. The School Improvement Advisers have been working with the school on their improvement as well which assisted the Service assess the right level of support for schools. The school is aware of its current position and the improvements it needs to make. The Head of Education indicated that it was proposed to feed back to scrutiny the results of school monitoring visits.</p>
<p>In relation to the sixth form, do you use Teams or Zoom to deliver subjects to pupils through the Medium of Welsh.</p> <p>How do you support learners, do teachers travel between schools e.g. to teach physics.</p>	<p>Officer Response: The Council uses E-Ysgol which is an online provision which runs through the Medium of Welsh. Once the subject provision has been assessed E-Ysgol can be used for pupils from across the County to access the provision. That resource has been shared nationally as an example of good practice.</p> <p>Science teachers are expected to teach</p>



	<p>at all key stage levels. The Council has also appointed a science adviser to work with schools and teachers and provide an additional resource. The Council also works with the Mid Wales Partnership who undertake outreach work with schools which is available bilingually in North Powys.</p>
<p>There was a case study regarding Bro Hyddgen and Llanfyllin schools working closer together on mathematics which was referred to by the WJEC (Welsh Joint Education Committee). This does have potential at the sixth form level.</p> <p>Is the sixth form funding totally funded by the grant from Welsh Government or does an element come from Powys.</p>	<p>Officer Response: This is completely funded from the Post 16 grant. The Council is working with schools on the offer available to pupils to avoid duplication. As far as it is known there is no cross subsidisation from pre-16 to post 16.</p>
<p>In relation to capital receipts is the leisure centre site within the ownership of Powys or are there any covenants or restrictions to realise this as an asset. It is also important to understand the lifetime costs of investments over a fifty year investment It would be helpful to see the leisure centre costs sitting alongside the school costs so that the total cost both financially and environmentally could be seen.</p>	<p>Cabinet Member Response: The financing of this project is part of the MTFs and the Powys element of the funding is coming from prudential borrowing. The sites identified by Members for potential disposal would not be available until the build had been completed, so there are opportunities to consider other uses for the building or achieving a capital receipt through their sale. If the properties were sold this capital receipt could be used to reduce the borrowing later in the project or elsewhere in the capital programme.</p> <p>Officer Response: In terms of the Leisure Centre the capital receipt is estimated at £385k (2020). The whole life costs are shown in the Outline Business Case (P63 of the agenda pack- £25m for option 9 and £34m for option 10). This information can be checked and included in the Cabinet report. Capital receipts need to be included as well.</p> <p>The Bro Dyfi Leisure Centre is in the Council's ownership.</p>
<p>In terms of the numbers for the school. How certain are you that the numbers for the new school are right.</p>	<p>Officer Response: The projections are carried out annually by the Schools Service statistician. The figures are also checked with the school as they know how many pupils are planning to come into the school. The</p>

	school recognised that the lower figures were accurate. Some flexibility for growth is also built into the figures.
To what extent do you take account of any future proposed developments in the town.	Officer Response: The pupil projections do not take external factors into account but the Service also looks at the Local Development Plan and possible other factors to determine the final figures.

**Comments / Discussion:**

- The Council needs to ensure it has the right management of a new build so that the issues experienced in Brecon following the completion of the build are not repeated.
- Welcome the new build.
- Not convinced about the case of not including the leisure element in the project.
- Need to recommend getting on with this build as soon as possible as costs are mounting due to delays.
- Is the value of the capital receipt on the Leisure Centre correct and is there a covenant restricting house building on this site. The main capital receipt would be from the primary school site. (It was clarified that the estimated capital receipts were - Library £120k, Primary School £431k, Canolfan Hyddgen £300k)
- The Housing Services has expressed an interest in the Primary School Site.
- The Leisure Centre site would be difficult to develop due to its position and location in the former Plas mansion house so there may be restrictions imposed by CADW as to what could be developed on the leisure centre site.
- Welsh Government are pushing net zero carbon schemes but an assessment was undertaken of the new build including the leisure facility and net carbon zero cannot be achieved where there is a leisure facility which includes a pool.
- Should the Council approach Welsh Government about the unintended consequences of the funding formula and green schemes so that for co-location one form of funding does not affect other funding available.

**Outcomes:**

Scrutiny made the following observations:

- The Committee welcomed:
  - The proposed new building for the school.
  - The consultation with local people as to whether the library should be moved to the new complex.
- The Committee noted:
  - That the estimated cost of replacing the leisure centre was £6m, whilst improvements to bring the existing building to acceptable standards and maintenance over 10 years was in the region of £3.5m.
  - That any refurbishment to the leisure centre needed to be flexible to take account of service users' needs.
  - That if band B funding was used for the leisure facility it would mean that the Council could not build other schools elsewhere.

- That pupil projections had been revised for the new school from 620 originally to 540 and that numbers included those projected to be attending the school from across the border with other counties as well. The revised projection had been accepted by the school and also took account for some growth in future.
- That the future retention, repurposing or possible sale of Canolfan Hyddgen was being considered as part of the wider discussions in relation to the proposal.
- That the size of the 3G pitch at the school would be dependent on the inclusion (or not) of the library in the complex.
- The Committee requested that:
  - Potential capital receipts from the sale of existing buildings as well as lifetime costs which were included in the economic case be included in the main Cabinet report which was accepted by officers.
- The Committee remained unconvinced about the case of not including the leisure facility within the campus, but also understood the impact of its inclusion on the funding available for other schemes. In addition, whilst Welsh Government were pushing net carbon zero schemes, it was accepted that this could not be achieved in a leisure facility with a swimming pool.
- The Committee expressed concern:
  - That the project be progressed as soon as possible in view of increasing costs due to delays.
  - That there needed to be good management of the build to overcome issues on previous projects, for example with the build of Brecon High School where remedial work had to be undertaken after the school was occupied, are addressed.
  - That the unintended knock-on impact on funding schemes in following Welsh Government's policy on the co-location of facilities, be brought to Welsh Government's attention.

#### **Scrutiny's Recommendations to Cabinet**

- 1. Potential capital receipts from the sale of existing buildings as well as lifetime costs which were included in the economic case be included in the main Cabinet report which was accepted by officers**
- 2. That the project be progressed as soon as possible in view of increasing costs due to delays**
- 3. That there needed to be good management of the build to overcome issues on previous projects**
- 4. That the unintended knock-on impact on funding schemes in following Welsh Government's policy on the co-location of facilities, be brought to Welsh Government's attention**

<b>6. SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
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#### **Documents Considered:**

- Response to Scrutiny Recommendations – Llanfihangel Rhydithon
- Response to Scrutiny Recommendations - Llanbedr

#### **Issues Discussed:**

- Questions:

Question	Response
<p>Disappointed by the lack of information in the responses. The Cabinet response lacked detail and did not give the Committee an assurance that Cabinet had considered scrutiny's comments.</p>	<p>Cabinet Member Response: Take on board the comments regarding the need for a more detailed response from the Cabinet and officers which will be addressed in future documents.</p>
<p>There is an inconsistent approach from Cabinet. There is a response from Cabinet regarding Llanfihangel Rhydithon but when it was suggested to move Sennybridge school along the language continuum at yesterday's Cabinet meeting this was rejected.</p>	<p>Cabinet Member Response: The paper regarding Sennybridge was capital paper rather than a schools transformation paper. The best time to consider this was during the Brecon area review. However, it can be looked at as part of discussions on the WESP and what can be achieved in the future.</p>
<p>The impression given in respect of these two schools is that these schools may remain open which has been confusing for parents and pupils. However, documents state that schools will ultimately close next year. Can the Cabinet Member give an assurance that whilst the delay is to look at alternative proposals the schools will eventually close.</p>	<p>Cabinet Member Response: The papers considered by Cabinet could have abandoned or postponed the previous decisions. The Cabinet chose to postpone the process and undertake the reviews. Abandoning the proposals would have delayed matters and led to the need for another consultation process.</p> <p>If alternative proposals come forward then it will lead to opportunities to do something different. In the long term the interest of the Cabinet Member is in the long term welfare and benefits of the pupils in the schools and to explore other avenues for Welsh Language provision in the Llanfihangel Rhydithon catchment.</p> <p>Officer Response: Unless the Cabinet makes a different decision the original decision will be implemented.</p>

**Outcomes:**

- **Noted.**

<b>7.</b>	<b>WORK PROGRAMME</b>
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The Head of Education outlined a hybrid model of professional learning for Members. This would be by means of pre-recorded videos prepared by officers which members could watch in their own time. Responses would then be captured. This is a process of professional learning used in Education.

It is the intention that a suite of slides and videos to be made available to Members regarding key elements such as school improvement, changes to the

Estyn framework guidance, the new curriculum for Wales. This would assist time management for both Members and officers. Some of the key questions that officers were being asked could be answered by this process and the information could be shared to all Members. The Committee was requested to pilot this process and then the discussions at scrutiny could be tailored based on the discussions during the process.

**Comments:**

- This does not replace scrutiny meetings.
- There would continue to be discussions at scrutiny meetings as hearing the views of other Members is helpful during a debate. Observations could be drawn from the responses and considered by the Committee. It would also only be items which the Committee considered appropriate. In addition it would allow more targeted discussion at meetings with the background information already having been provided.
- This would be a rolling programme and there are items which are due to come to scrutiny so the information could be provided in advance.
- Whilst the Head of Education might suggest a list of subjects for the Committee to consider this would not prevent the Committee suggesting its own subjects for consideration.

Members decided that they were content to pilot the process.

**Work Programme.**

The Committee noted the schedule of future meetings. It was noted that the performance reports would be delayed until the December meeting.

The Committee suggested the following additional subjects could be included in the work programme:

- Annual updates on the Regional Educational Partnership with Ceredigion
- Early years / pre school
- ALN.
- School transport
- Scrutinising the Regional Skills Partnership and future skills for net zero.
- Updates on the WESP

**County Councillor R G Thomas (Chair)**