

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LEARNING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD BY ZOOM ON MONDAY, 30 JANUARY 2023**

PRESENT

County Councillor R G Thomas (Chair)

County Councillors A W Davies, G D Jones, C Kenyon-Wade, DW Meredith, L Roberts, L Rijnenberg, G Morgan, D Bebb, K Chedgzoy, Mrs S. Davies and Mrs M Evitts

Cabinet & Portfolio Holders in Attendance:

Leader; J Gibson Watt, Deputy Leader; M Dorrance

P Roberts, for a Learning Powys, D A Thomas, for Finance and Corporate Transformation.

Officers:

Jane Thomas, Lynette Lovell, Georgie Bevan, Anwen Orrells, Wyn Richards, Emma Palmer, Mari Thomas, Catherine James, Nancy Owen, Jenny Spraggon.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from:

County Councillors: Bryn Davies, Pete Lewington, Jackie Charlton

Officers: Dr Caroline Turner

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

4. DRAFT 2023 - 2024 BUDGET, REPORTS AND IMPACT ASSESSMENTS
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Documents Considered:

- Cabinet report to provide the overall context for the budget setting process.
- Scrutiny Report – Budget Questions
- Appendices A-J
- Impact Assessments

Issues Discussed:

- The Portfolio Holder for a Learning Powys stated that the reports to be considered concern the financial position moving forward for two parts of Education, The Schools Service central budget also including parts of the Youth Services and the Delegated Schools budget.

- The Director for Education confirmed that the budget reports presented were the result of an extensive and rigorous review of the Service budget, with work undertaken alongside all Schools following the Pandemic.
- The Head of Education confirmed a comprehensive review of the Service area and Schools budgets with identified specific areas where savings could be made. Challenge discussions were held within the Service and by the Cabinet to ensure budget pressures could be met.
- Professional Lead for Schools Support Services referred to specific headlines as noted below:
 - ❖ Curriculum for Wales Savings – to use grant to offset base funded staff.
 - ❖ Removal of the vacant SIA (School Improvement Advisor) post which had been vacant for considerable time.
 - ❖ Continuation of Income generation across the service – to look at Training opportunities to other LA's and Estyn Inspections.
 - ❖ Reduction in External Secondary School Strategy Support, whilst internal support has been increased.
 - ❖ Post 16 transition to be managed within the Service.
 - ❖ The removal of long vacant hours within HIVI and Autism Teaching.
 - ❖ Transformation Stage 1 PRU (Pupil Referral Unit).
 - ❖ Review of 3rd Sector spend, in relation to the Action for Children Contract
 - ❖ Grant funded staff to manage pay inflation.
 - ❖ A realignment of Union costs to be funded by the delegated contingency.
 - ❖ Restructures in particular areas (not across the board)
 - ❖ Looking at the EIG retained to offset Foundation Learning based funded staff.
 - ❖ Consultancy budget to be removed and replaced by the work of the SIA's.
 - ❖ VAWDASV contribution

• **Questions:**

Question	Response
Request for further explanation in relation to a post that has been vacant for a period time, if not paying an individual how can that be seen as a cost saving?	Officer Comment – This is a cost savings as the funding would be removed from the base budget.
Money has been removed from the central budget, but individual schools are picking this up from delegated budgets, how is this affecting the overall Council position?	Officer Comment – There is a correct alignment of spend to ensure monies are taken from correct budget
Is a surplus expected as funding from vacant posts may have been utilised elsewhere within the service? Which other area of the service will be impacted since possible overspend has been mitigated by the vacant post?	Officer Comment – There will be no surplus within the budget this financial year. The element around the removal of vacant posts recognised the changing nature of the team over the last 2 years, which now reflects the team

	<p>structure as it needs to be.</p> <p>Officer Comment – In relation to the out-turn of the schools' service, over the last few months officers have been working on this. There is an overall projected surplus for the schools' service central overall. However, in relation to the vacant hours in the budget proposals, these would have been included as slippage as part of the overall underspend. There have been no virement requirement to move those monies temporarily elsewhere, therefore would be projected in the outturn position which is an overall surplus and then part of the review to establish the structure with the Schools Service moving forward.</p>
<p>In respect of the Grant funding element replacing the revenue, how long is the Grant funding in place for?</p>	<p>Officer Comment – The Grant funding looking at is the ongoing regular main grants received year on year. If there were to be any changes in the funding of these Grants the WG would have to undertake significant consultation and give notice in relation to any changes.</p>
<p>What was this Grant currently being spent on?</p>	<p>Officer Comment – Grants may have differing terms and conditions and will be spent on the need within schools in that particular year. In terms of staff, who are funding by those Grants, which will be seen as the need.</p> <p>Officer Comment – For the schools service since last September, are no longer within ERW, now within the MWEP under a Memorandum of Understanding with Ceredigion. The grant funding for schools' improvement comes directly into the LA from WG. The LA has the discretion to utilise these grants as effectively as possible as part of the MWEP. The grants are as permanent as they can be, due to the fact they are for school improvement, which has</p>

	<p>enabled the service to offset some the posts from base and some of the work from our base budget into the grant funded monies.</p>
<p>Previous impression was that the money notionally received via WG and ERW, was of more value for money than compared to other LA's. Is Powys to receive the same level of grant funding to maintain current level of work in supporting our schools going forward?</p>	<p>Officer Comment – Yes, previously Powys was part of a larger region and there were economies of scale. When looked at secondary school improvement, it was the secondary treatment ERW we were able to access as well as the expertise. Under the MWEP, have appointed our own staff, and alongside Ceredigion cover all aspects of work with the grant funding received. Assurances given that via the MWEP, and with scrutiny by both WG and ESTYN, grant funding is utilised effectively, and expectations are this will provide a significant impact, particularly in secondary schools, going forward</p>
<p>Committee Members were unsure on how the MWEP will be scrutinised?</p>	<p>Officer Comment – This is on the forward work programme to bring to Scrutiny Committee a little later in the year. Scrutiny will have the opportunity to evaluate our performance and how effective MWEP has been alongside the business plan of the MWEP for the next financial year.</p>
<p>Committee Members requested assurance that as the VAWDASV, Train the Trainer scheme, was being brought in-house, there was capacity within the service to undertake this and are plans in place to commence Train the Trainer sessions.</p>	<p>Officer Comment – We do have confidence in the model and our capacity to deliver this training. It enables increased connections with our schools through our SIA's and the PLT. Part of the model is to work with work our service area, to enable that element of coinciding with teaching resources as well as delivering that training to staff.</p> <p>Officer Comment – Discussion ongoing and development planning underway for the beginning of the next financial year. We have full confidence to be able to deliver against this target and deliver an agile training service that will enable our schools to participate, resulting in increased</p>

	<p>compliance.</p> <p>Officer Comment – Assurances given that it is vital piece of work, and essential that school staff are trained as at the frontline of the effects and impact on children. We need to improve on compliance and include different ways of training. We have a reviewed the GDPR model and will look to use a similar tool to improve the performance of training and fully equip out staff to deal with such issues.</p>
<p>Committee Member stated that the Impact assessments in relation to the headlines given above were really disappointing. There is not enough information given in relation to realistic savings. In addition, the Committee require information on what impact or not, there will be on the service. Nowhere within the IA reports does it give the strength of narrative to mitigate impact of savings.</p> <p>Chair commented that amendments to the IA's needed to be completed prior to the budget being agreed, as the Committee cannot in the current format mitigate what the impact will be on the schools' service.</p>	<p>Officer Comment – In terms of the assurance and savings, acknowledge that Scrutiny do not feel that this is reflected within the IA documentation. However, assurances can be given that the Service has given a significant amount of time and reviewed in detail every line of the budget and identify areas to ensure moving in the right direction, i.e., the removal of posts. We know that this provision is provided across a breadth of officers which falls in line with our ALN (Additional Learning Needs) strategy which is a better model than previous.</p> <p>We have certainly made sure that those potential savings that have been identified, fit with the need and future of the Service.</p>
<p>What was the impact of the PRU (Pupil Referral Unit), aware that the Transformation Centres are for subsequent years with £0.5m put aside, however unsure how much is earmarked for the rebuild of Cedewain? The VAWDASV contribution is that impacting on the White Ribbon post that is disappearing?</p>	<p>Officer Comment – Cannot comment on the White Ribbon post.</p> <p>This part of the budget in respect of the Schools' Service we have looked at the different ways in which we can deliver training to our frontline workers. The impact Corporately will be looked at separately.</p> <p>Officer Comment – In relation to the Powys ALN strategy and the roll-out, we have been identified in the ESTYN report as a</p>

	<p>County that is moving in the right direction moving forward with our ALN strategy and our approaches.</p> <p>The next step was to review our PRU model, which has been in place a significant amount of time, we have already identified potential savings after reviewing spending patterns. In the longer term we will be reviewing the PRU structures to ensure that they are fit for the needs of the young people accessing them.</p> <p>In terms of Specialist Centres these will be reviewed across Powys to ensure they fit with Powys' ALN strategy and vision, incorporating the new ALN Act that more ALN pupils are integrated within mainstream education to access learning opportunities.</p>
<p>There is clearly a pressure under leisure centres, with increased funding to Freedom Leisure in relation to their service to schools i.e., swimming pools to remain open for the next 12 months, what assurances can be given on this matter?</p> <p>Chair commented that this is an important point as this document does not identify the urgency that was expressed last December, with a temporary closure of Leisure Centres and the impact that had on schools. Scrutiny Committees across the board have offered to assist with this matter, and to date there is no mention within the budget papers.</p>	<p>Officer Comment – Whilst assurances cannot be offered regarding Leisure Centres as out of the Schools Service remit, assurances can be given that the Schools Service are continuing to work closely with this Service area to ensure there would be no impact on curriculum provision and delivery.</p> <p>Officer Comment – From a Schools' Service we work very closely with Leisure reiterating comments that whilst cannot give assurances on Leisure's Centres, the curriculum offer regarding Leisure Centres could be done differently, yet effectively, assuring that the offer is not affected.</p>
<p>The savings that have been identified, some of which are quite ambitious, are they realistically achievable? How has the calculation of savings been reached regarding turning off lights, is this based on the current electricity price or the potential contracted price? In addition, the cessation of photocopying activity, can Scrutiny</p>	<p>Officer Comment – Chairs of Governing Bodies and Head Teachers are responsible for their own school's budget. As an Education Service we have tried to give examples of best practice across other schools and sectors, and have modelled that saving across school, admittedly there are some schools which are already doing this.</p>

<p>have clarification of what this means?</p> <p>Chair commented that from the information provided by the Officer and in the budget reports, schools will have to make these decisions on the savings otherwise the budget will not stack up. The gas increase noted within the documents is at 283%, the current gas price has fallen, with predictions that it will continue to do so in the short-term.</p>	<p>This remains a School-by-school decision with support via the finance surgeries.</p> <p>Photocopying budget again is a decision by individual schools as to how much they allocate to this. We are in a digital world, with schools inside and outside of Powys who have moved to a more digital approach of working and how they capture learner work and evidence. This can be measured as a saving and as an important skill for our learners to develop as they move from education into the world of work.</p> <p>Our finance officers use the toolkit with schools to open discussion including the benchmarking tool to give options and relevant information for potential savings.</p> <p>The savings have been modelled by the Finance team on the most recent energy price information they held. The service is continuing to re-model given the volatility in the price fluctuation of utilities.</p>
<p>If schools are already switching off lights and reducing temperatures, savings will have to be found elsewhere, Committee would have expected to have seen more detailed information within the IA's.</p> <p>Chair commented that if greater detail had been provided within the IA's, the Committee would have greater assurance that savings targets could be met.</p>	<p>Officer Comment – The saving noted is a collective saving as aware that some schools have already acted in these areas, and these have been factored in.</p> <p>Officer Comment – Finance had factored in a global figure which was then reduced, as aware some schools were already actioning these measures, some could do more, allowance for this has been factored into the estimates given.</p> <p>Officer Comment – The schools' service is continuing to work with individual schools on their budgets, reviewing spend patterns, the intrinsic level of detail of which energy source they use across the whole 93 schools' estate.</p> <p>Officer Comment –</p>

	<p>The benchmarking tool is proving effective not only to the Schools' Service, but schools, who are able to compare spend patterns and pressures to make potential savings.</p>
<p>Have these sums of monies been allocated school by school as different energy requirements and efficiencies for a new school as opposed to older buildings within the schools' estate?</p> <p>Chair commented that the Committee have reservations that the savings put forward can be made, there are particular issues with the secondary school sector which may have to draw down on reserves with some already reporting in deficit.</p>	<p>Officer Comment –</p> <p>Even if we park the energy element at the moment, there are changes that are required by some schools.</p> <p>In terms of the energy price, which finance teams continue to monitor, the Executive Director of Economy, Environment and 4P's Service is undertaking work on drawing down grant funding for green energy. Work will be completed on the schools' infrastructure to ascertain how this can be developed further to move towards net zero and reduce costs to schools.</p>
<p>What is the current year's budget for the education services is and what is the total draft proposal figure for next year's education service?</p>	<p>Officer Comment –</p> <p>Table 5 in the budget report, does show the allocated budget for current financial year for both the Education Service and the Delegated Budget, and then shows the increase across both of those budgets for the next financial year's budget.</p> <p>Education Central Budget 22/23 base budget is £17.3m rising to £18.4m for 23/24</p> <p>The Delegated Budget 22/23 is £79.5m rising to £83.8m for 23/24.</p> <p>The Central education budget receives an extra 6.5% uplift from the previous year and the Delegated Budget received an extra 5.5% for the same period.</p>
<p>Within the budget report for Cabinet the MTFs principles state that reserves will not be used to finance recurrent budgets pressures or keep down Council Tax rises therefore Schools should not be expected to use their reserves for on-going costs</p>	<p>Officer Comment –</p> <p>The principle is within the MTFs, however in terms of the use of specific reserves, given there was an increase in reserves at the end of last year, we are drawing on those reserves as a one-off to meet these additional costs. The expectation is that Schools would look to manage these costs for one year, if the situation continues and energy costs remain as high by</p>

	<p>2024/25, would have to review the future years budget to see if this pressure needs to be accommodated differently.</p>
<p>What will be the financial position as at the end of March 2024?</p>	<p>Cabinet Member Comment – Whilst the increases in the delegated budget were below the rate of inflation, it must be noted that the WG settlement percentage increase was about 3% below the rate of inflation, it was impossible therefore to match the service areas increase above rate of inflation. The pay inflation and cost non-pay inflation that will impact the Education budget this year, if consider the current financial years pay award, it is approx. £7.6m As at the end of March 2024 every category of school, with the exception of Secondary Schools, will have a surplus balance in their reserves. The overall position with schools’ reserves would be a deficit of £1.5m which is manageable and will recover if projected forecasts with regard inflation rates are correct.</p> <p>Cabinet Member Response – OLA’s in Wales, in a rural context, are stating they are not able to protect their Schools Delegated Budgets, for example Carmarthenshire are looking at £2.8m, Ceredigion £2.1m to be found., Flintshire are discussing a 1% cut equating to £1m, with Conwy approx. a £3.6m cut.</p> <p>Officer Comment – The context across Wales is that Schools will be facing significant pressures on their budgets. Assurances given that the Schools Service met with Headteachers and Chairs of Governors in September at the start of the budget setting process and Improvement and Finance Officers continue to meet regularly with individual schools.</p>
<p>Comment made by the Cabinet Member that all schools with the</p>	<p>Officer Comment – Confirmed this is an average.</p>

<p>exception of Secondary School Sector had reserves, however, would like confirmation that reserves refers to an average across the Sectors? As there will be some schools in any Sector that will struggle with the financial pressures.</p> <p>Chair commented that the Delegated School budget reserves across the Sectors stood at £9m: Primary Schools - £8m Special Schools – £1m Secondary Schools – £19k</p> <p>Committee requested a report on the range of reserves best case to worst position.</p>	<p>Officer Comment – Confirmation there are a handful of Primary Schools that are in a deficit position, two were in a deficit position at the start of the year, however the Sector overall is in a surplus.</p>
<p>Chair read extract from Schools Forum notes relating to Table 5: “The main budget report that the proposed rise for Schools Delegated Budget is the second lowest rise of all departments and well below the 8.2% increase seen across the Council.” Is that equitable?</p>	<p>Officer Comment – We have collaborated really closely with all schools to ensure that excessive pressure is not placed on them. The Budget Forum meeting was a productive meeting, including a review of the Schools funding formula that went out to consultation, the budget is not putting unnecessary pressure on schools but is acceptable and manageable.</p>
<p>Do schools know what their budgets will be for the next financial year?</p>	<p>Officer Comment – In September / October 2022 schools were given indicative figures, considering inflation, at that point what was potentially available to schools in terms of their additional funding. Based on the indicative figures, schools submitted their budgets in December 2022. Since then, predictions are that pressures will be reduced, or funding increased therefore satisfied that schools have a good understanding of where they are or will be, with allocations for 2023-2024 being given the first week of March, with indicative funding for future years as well. Finance surgeries will take place throughout March with schools to review how to manage pressures.</p>
<p>Support from WG will fall dramatically over the next couple of years, and this</p>	<p>Officer Comment – In relation to the comment that no</p>

<p>year's settlement was an opportunity to start a more significant transformation of the schools within Powys, there are no such transformational proposals within this budget.</p> <p>The utilisation of schools' reserves has placed them at a significant risk what is being done to mitigate this?</p>	<p>progress had been made on Transformation. WAVE 2 included the review of the Crickhowell catchment and expecting information from officers in the next few weeks, to commence the formal engagement in the Llanfyllin catchment area, which will form the main focus of Transformation work over the next 6-8months.</p>
<p>The case for change within the Crickhowell area was smaller in comparison to the North, however the delay in closures within the Crickhowell catchment would have incurred a cost.</p> <p>Chair commented that the Corporate Improvement Plan document reads "that the cost of transformation over the lifetime of the school assets is cheaper than the status quo." It is essential that transformation is moved at pace to provide better education, equity and help drive down costs.</p> <p>The proposed Budget is using school reserves, the Committee believe that Transformation needs to progress at speed as it includes community and leisure facilities projects which may add to school budgets moving forward.</p>	<p>Cabinet Member Response –</p> <p>The delay with the implementation of closure of Dolau and Llanbedr were due to both cases being under judicial review, with Officers within the Purdah period had already taken the decision not to close as of the 1st of August 2022. Decision therefore made, for educational reasons, to transfer pupils at the end of a school year rather than during. This time also allowed for the Crickhowell area review to commence. Issues that have arisen around Llanfihangel Rhydithon have established precedents within the Council Area which will enable progress in future with reference to precedents rather than to set it.</p>
<p>Report to Cabinet states that Primary schools had performed well at inspection, with no mention that some Secondary Schools had not?</p> <p>In terms of the financial toolkit for schools, whilst officers were commended, it would not provide answers for all schools.</p>	<p>Officer Comment –</p> <p>Very valid point regarding work required alongside the Headteachers of our Secondary Schools. Within the service area we have expanded the Secondary School Improvement Team with impact of work with schools being reviewed. We recognise that in terms of standards and budgets there is more work to be undertaken.</p> <p>We do have a strong Primary Sector profile across Powys.</p> <p>The Toolkit has proven useful, but it is noted that some schools require additional support from officer in relation to budgets.</p> <p>Officer Comment –</p> <p>Assurances given to Scrutiny that the Service recognised the need for</p>

	<p>succession planning within Powys, hence appointment of the Secondary Improvement Team to collaborate closely with our leaders in schools across various elements of improvement.</p> <p>From a Service perspective, confident we can help provide the bespoke service the schools require to continue the improvement journey.</p> <p>In terms of the Toolkit where information is unavailable, we have been looking at spend patterns and budget lines with our Head teachers and Chair of Governors.</p>
<p>With reference to the Finance Resource model, is it optimistic in the assumption of a reducing pay award?</p>	<p>Officer Comment –</p> <p>In terms of pay, all of the money received via the WG Settlement has been passported to the schools’ budgets. The funding formula pays at the ISR rate for that school, and there is a range for the size of school, this remains a school-based decision, if schools have extra staff not within the resource allocation, they have to fund accordingly.</p> <p>Officer Comment –</p> <p>For clarification purposes the pay award has been included at 3.5% as set by WG.</p>
<p>Appendix A in relation to Capital Programme expenditure of £33m, £6.1m for other school schemes, is this related to Calon Y Dderwen or other elements i.e., Ysgol Calon Cymru? and £2.5m for school improvements could the Portfolio Holder expand on these?</p>	<p>Cabinet Member Response –</p> <p>There have been delays on the North Powys Ysgol Calon Y Dderwen project, with the infrastructure and development work are ongoing. Ysgol Bro Hyddgen has attained approval and would progress to the next business stage. Work is progressing with Ysgol Cedewain and Brynllawarch and waiting WG response on the Sennybridge proposal.</p> <p>Main focus on any additional capital works in relation to Llanfyllin, and the review on the Gwernyfed catchment.</p>
<p>Where are the Capital programme elements relating to a Greener Powys?</p>	<p>Cabinet Member Response –</p> <p>All projects to WG have to be net zero elements, with questions from the Minister which need to be addressed at</p>

	<p>the next stage of the Ysgol Bro Hyddgen proposals.</p> <p>The Environment Service area are working on external grants which are not within the capital programme presented, in order to improve the greening agenda and energy efficiency will add to that.</p> <p>Officer Comment – In terms of the County-wide Decarbonisation plan, work is to be undertaken. Discussions are ongoing with partners via the PSB on all issues in relation to climate and nature can this be undertaken as a collective. The Capital programme will remain with the projects determined by the previous Administration, other than the recent commitment around Bro Hyddgen revised scheme.</p>
<p>When will the decarbonisation plan be published?</p> <p>Chair commented as only a notional figure of £10m for 2027/2028 documented within the papers, it was unclear what were the capital costs of Transformation and concerned that there were no estimated projected costs.</p>	<p>Officer Comment – Work is progressing there is an existing Climate Board and there has been some realignment of benchmarking and calculations around Net Zero, but not aware of timescales of publishing.</p> <p>Officer Comment – The £10m is re: emerging work, feasibility proposals will come forward in WAVE 2. Funding envelop discussion with WG. Focus remains on the live projects, do not have capacity to scope out the full extent but we do have within the papers the savings of transformation versus supporting the status quo.</p> <p>Officer Comment – £10M identified in 2027/2028 to continue the schools' transformation work after current bands A & B have finished. It is an indicative figure, as have not have the detail on what allocation we will receive from WG, or which projects would be covered. It is important to get indicative figures into the Strategy to start to plan and look to how projects can be financed in the future. This figure will be finalised</p>

	nearer the time.
<p>In respect of Sports and Leisure there is a less than 1m budgeted spend, how will this impact on Schools? What is the breakdown of the schemes relating to the £2.5m per annum until 2027-2028 for major improvements concern held this may lead to additional maintenance costs for Schools?</p> <p>Chair commented that concern heightened as there is a maintenance backlog plan is over £80m, is the £2.5m satisfactory to meet need?</p>	<p>Officer Comment – In terms of major improvements this is an annual allocation with projects identified and agreed on an annual basis and based on the prioritised work across the estate.</p> <p>Officer Comment – The current in-year budget does include the Community Focussed Capital Grant for Schools</p> <p>Officer Comment – In terms of curriculum delivery, Schools Service continues to work closely with the Head of Service for Leisure to review the impact on schools and to ensure broad and balanced curriculum delivery.</p>
<p>School population school numbers will fall over next 5 years, as not identified as a pressure within the documents, is the budget able cope with this pressure?</p>	<p>Officer Comment – When we have a forecast of decrease in numbers it will affect the budget, work is being undertaken with schools where numbers decreasing, to ensure they have the correct curriculum offer, make changes and decisions where appropriate and necessary in a timely manner. It is easier for the secondary school sector to plan and forecast for this eventuality.</p> <p>Officer Comment – When pupil numbers fall, this is reflected in the WG settlement received, with less money allocated to schools, therefore the Schools delegated budget funding would be reduced accordingly. It would not be shown as a pressure as the changes would have to be made at a school level to accommodate that.</p>
<p>In terms of the charges schedule with the home to school transport and the Vacant Seat scheme charges, confusion remained if scheme was still active?</p>	<p>Officer Comment – In regard to the Vacant Seat Scheme, there were agreements in place when the scheme ended, but will check with transport and confirm.</p>
<p>There is a large amount of money coming out of the schools' budget,</p>	<p>Officer Comment – When reviewing school budgets where</p>

<p>Impact Assessment address individual items, yet does not reference staff numbers</p>	<p>there are reducing numbers of pupils and additional pressures, including where staffing may be affected, Scrutiny can be assured that the Schools Service work with schools through the Finance Surgeries and with HR on level of resource required.</p>
<p>The Reduced Maintenance Budget there was mention of impact on Education, the outcome is marked as “bad” can this impact be clarified on the school estate?</p>	<p>Officer Comment – The Service continues to work closely with Property Service colleagues weekly in relation to school compliance and building works. There is awareness of issues that need to be addressed i.e., fire checks,</p>
<p>Has the fire door maintenance work been completed?</p>	<p>Officer Comment – There has been a programme of robust fire risk assessment with schools throughout the academic year, with completion due in the summer term 2023. The budget is reviewed, remaining agile with use of available funding pots, identifying those which come from capital grants and existing revenue streams.</p>
<p>Will the maintenance budget be reduced?</p>	<p>Officer Comment – It would be difficult to predict what maintenance issues could arise given the age of the majority of the schools estate. However, we continue to work effectively and collaboratively with schools and contractors on issues.</p>
<p>Will there be another contingency fund put in place going forward?</p>	<p>Officer Comment – There is a contingency fund in place annually, schools also have access to grants for major improvements to help address issues, although do not know details yet.</p>
<p>Was the contingency fund overspent this year?</p>	<p>Officer Comment – Confirmation given that the Contingency fund was not overspent in this current financial year, nor anticipating that it would be.</p>
<p>Does the Budget survey go directly to schools?</p>	<p>Officer Comment – Yes</p>

Outcomes:

Scrutiny made the following observations:

The Committee welcomed:

- The preparation of the finance toolkit and benchmarking tool circulated to Schools and commended Officers for this work. However, this was not the answer for all schools, as some will require additional support to review spend patterns and realise potential savings.
- That Leisure Centres were to remain open, given the position which arose in December 2022 and the Officers' assurance of continued work with Freedom Leisure so there was no impact on the curriculum offer, provision and delivery.
- That Officers have confidence in the capacity within schools to undertake the Train the Trainer scheme around Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.
- That direct funding to the Council for the Mid Wales Education Partnership was being provided.
- The assurance that the savings proposals provided the way forward for the Service's development in the future.

The Committee noted:

- That finance surgeries had been held with individual schools reviewing their financial pressures and budget savings and would be held again following the allocation of revised individual budgets.
- That the expectation was that schools would manage cost pressures for one year only and should those pressures continue then additional funding would need to be considered.
- Assurances that all funding for Education from Welsh Government had been passported to schools.
- Overall contentment with officers' reassurance that the budget can be delivered.
- That school pupil numbers are expected to fall over the next five years, with fewer children within the County, and some pupils receiving education out of county. This will be easier for High Schools to plan for, and Officers advised that the Service would work with schools where numbers are decreasing. In addition, the Welsh Government settlement would reduce dependent on pupil numbers, therefore changes would be made at an individual school level.
- That the PRU (Pupil Referral Unit) model has been in place for a significant amount of time. Officers assured that the structure and savings are under review to ensure provision is in line with the emerging landscape.

The Committee requested that:

- Clarification be provided as to which schools across Powys will struggle to reach a balanced budget and assurance that these are monitored.
- The Impact Assessments include a more detailed narrative to provide assurance that changes are achievable, and savings realistic with no impact on the service. Schools to be closely monitored to assist mitigated risk as soon as possible.

- Clarity be provided on why additional documents provided were confidential.
- Clarification of the notional capital amount of £10m for 2027/28 and the projects to be undertaken.
- Officers meet with County Councillors online in their role as school governors, to provide information on setting a balanced budget and ensuring Members are aware of decisions affecting their wards.
- Confirmation or clarity be provided regarding the increased cost of school meals for those who are not in receipt of free school meals.
- A detailed breakdown of proposals within the Leisure Review, including those that will impact on schools' budgets. The Committee expressed concern in relation to additional costs for pupils to travel to swimming lessons.
- Additional information on the Mid Wales Education Partnership (MWEP) be shared with the Committee. Officers confirmed that the MWEP is subject to Estyn inspection and scrutiny by Welsh Government, and assurances were given that funding is being utilised effectively.
- That a comment be included in the Cabinet report that whilst primary schools were performing well this was not necessarily the case for all secondary schools.
- That the work on decarbonisation be included within the Capital Programme.

The Committee remained unconvinced about:

- The pace and direction of the Transformation programme by the Cabinet. However, this aspiration is not reflected in the draft budget documents, with significant transformation opportunities missed or pushed back. The Committee was of the view that this delay in funding being released to all schools as a result of transformation contributed to schools having to use reserves currently.

The Committee expressed concern:

- In respect of potential savings, in particular on photocopying and energy efficiencies, figures quoted are estimated across the school estate and actual figures would have to be calculated on a school-by-school basis.
- Regarding the difficulties and pressures on the Delegated budget, particularly if schools have used reserves to meet the additional pressures. Assurance was sought that mitigation of risk has been factored in.
- Whether the stated savings could be delivered, as reserves are falling within the Secondary Sector.
- That reserves can only be used once.
- Regarding Maintenance and Health and Safety which is an extremely important area and should be covered comprehensively. An assurance was given by Officers that schools are safe for both learners and staff. Extensive H&S checks were completed during the COVID period, with Risk Assessments to assist schools. There was concern that there is an £82m backlog of works which the budget will not meet.
- That schools have not been informed of their budgets for the next financial year. Officers stated that schools were given indicative figures in Sept / Oct 2022 regarding additional funding, therefore they have submitted their

budgets on that basis. Schools will receive updated indicative figures in March.

- That the Capital programme of £10m does not have any projected costs or proposals up to and including 2027/28.

There were no recommendations to the Cabinet.

County Councillor R G Thomas (Chair)