

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LEARNING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD BY ZOOM ON WEDNESDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2023

Present:

County Councillor Gwynfor Thomas (Chair)

County Councillors: G D Jones, D Bebb, AW Davies, B Davies, D Meredith, S McNicholas, Lucy Roberts

Co-opted Member: K Chedgzoy, S Davies, M Evitts.

Cabinet portfolio Holders in Attendance:

County Councillors:

P Roberts, Cabinet Member for a Learning Powys

D Thomas, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation

Officers: Lynette Lovell Director of Schools and Children's Services, Emma Palmer, Interim Director for Transformation and Communication, Georgie Bevan, Head of Schools Service, Marianne Evans Service Manager for Schools Transformation, Sarah Astley Transforming Education Strategic Programme Manager, Mari Thomas Deputy Head of Finance.

In attendance:

Cllr Graham Breeze – to add local Member comment.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from:

Cllrs G Preston, H Hulme - to add local Member comment.

2. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

The Committee received the following Declarations of Interest from Members relating to items to be considered on the agenda. As determined by the Monitoring Officer, K Chedgzoy should not be present during the discussion on the Llanfyllin / North Catchment Review under categorisation of prejudicial interest, as a Parent Governor at Ysgol Bro Cynllaith.

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. SECONDARY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY - CONTINUATION
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Committee in agreement that the continuation of the Secondary Schools Improvement Strategy should be held over until the next meeting scheduled for the 17th November 2023.

5.	CURRICULUM FOR WALES
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Committee in agreement that the Curriculum for Wales item should be postponed until the next meeting scheduled for the 17th November 2023.

6.	SCHOOLS TRANSFORMATION - LLANFYLLIN / NORTH WELSHPOOL CATCHMENT REVIEW
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Background: -

Precis provided by the Portfolio Holder on the process and the proposals set out in the Cabinet report, prepared by Officers with input from the community and Portfolio Holder.

Officers discussed the proposals contained within the following prepared reports in detail:

- Cabinet Paper – Llanfyllin Catchment Review
- Appendix A – Llanfyllin Engagement Report
- Appendix B – Llanfyllin Catchment Review June 2023 V2
- Appendix C – Llanfyllin Impact Assessment

Points raised by the Panel:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members.
<p>Chair noted the Portfolio Holder’s comment that the process had identified the timeframe did not permit all issues to be addressed. Chair added that it had been difficult for local Members, information had been divulged to schools, parents, staff, and pupils who were uncomfortable with the proposals, raised their viewpoints with local Members, who were not, at that time privy to the information detailed in the proposals.</p> <p>The view expressed by local Members, within the Scrutiny Committee, was of dissatisfaction that the matter was being dealt with after the fact. This has led to a difficult situation where other local Members, who had not been included in the process for comment, have requested to speak during this meeting to voice their and their communities views.</p> <p>Local Members did not have sight of the proposals until last week and that was following the intervention by the Council’s Monitoring Officer, in addition there were no local Member comments within the documents for Scrutiny to consider, closing date for which was today.</p>	<p>The Portfolio Holder stated that this matter was brought to Scrutiny Committee at a significantly earlier time in the process than previously. One of the recommendations from the audit report into Ysgol Calon Cymru in 2016 was that there had been insufficient Scrutiny engagement. Scrutiny involvement previously had been at the final objection report stages of the process.</p> <p>The current process allows for review of details in the business case, and rationale behind changes, prior to the commencement of the statutory consultation.</p> <p>Scrutiny Committee therefore have input into the decision-making process of whether to proceed to consultation or not.</p> <p>In terms of local Member involvement, local Members were invited to the discussion session in Llanfyllin, which gave the opportunity to Schools and the Governing Bodies also, to voice their views and concerns.</p>
<p>The report states that the process in the</p>	<p>The previous papers were published</p>

<p>North Powys catchment was re-started in April 2023, when was it stopped.</p> <p>An outline of the differences with the paper from 2020 and progress or actions in the intervening period was requested.</p> <p>Concern expressed that the North Powys catchment area was identified as of primary importance for transformation, why therefore did the Crickhowell catchment transformation programme supersede, as was far lower down on the Councils list of priorities.</p>	<p>following the business case in October 2020, in relation to school modification orders. However, the research based on the business case for the Ysgol Pennant, Llanfihangel, Llanrhaeadr ym Mochnant area, the transformation and build programme in Llansantffraid were not desirable to deliver.</p> <p>Original proposals for Ysgol Bro Cynllaith were brought forward, there was insufficient officer time for proposals to be implemented, in terms of statutory orders. In the intervening time there were a number of transformation pieces of work undertaken and catchment work commenced as soon as officer time was available.</p> <p>The Crickhowell programme was commenced as the Llanbedr site was under judicial review. There was a proposition brought forward to create an All through school, due to both schools being without a Headteacher, The decision was taken to prioritise and provide a settled position in Crickhowell.</p>
<p>The proposals appear to have applied an easy fix by the removal of 3 small schools, prior to catchment changes being undertaken. Concern raised of multiple moves for children until full transformation programme could be completed.</p> <p>There could potentially be pupils of Bryn Hafren school moved to Llandysilio school, Arddleen CP School was noted at capacity, with a later potential merge of Llandysilio, Carreghoffa and Arddleen, in a new build to incorporate the 3 schools, resulting in a further change for pupils.</p> <p>Clarification requested on the future numbers stated in the document included those from new housing projects. As live birth data added to projected numbers in the area, exceeds the number of available places.</p> <p>The Chair added that the points raised above would be similar to the</p>	<p>It would be difficult to transform the whole of the catchment at the same time. It has to be factored in that the Council has these 3 small schools, with proposals for closure. The Council would be required to know the pupil transition pathway and impact prior to progress made on the medium-term plans around other schools.</p> <p>It would take time for capital investment to be secured for a new build which would form a later part of the 10yr plan. Pupils currently in those 3 schools, would not be affected by a new build.</p> <p>Other factors requiring consideration and exploration are the future availability of CIW places, and the option of a future merger of Llandysilio, Arddleen and Carreghoffa schools which are currently in different High School catchments. It is a complex catchment area, and</p>

<p>Llansantffraid, Llangedwyn and Llanfechain proposal, unsure if would be similar for Ysgol Pennant, Llanrhaeadr as a suggestion that Ysgol Bro Cynllaith would not have surplus places.</p>	<p>we need to address where the challenges really are. There must not be a rush to a new build. The future data projections are on live birth data. We are aware of the planned housing developments in the area, which was why there would not be a rush to progress with a new build until outcomes have been realised in the housing developments.</p>
<p>An explanation was requested for why the capital expenditure proposals detailed in the previous plans of Sept 2020 on the Llanfyllin catchment, have been removed from the documents shared with Scrutiny. Surely it would be important to know the timeline and when investment will be made for communities to be brought on board with clear plans and commitments.</p> <p>There are examples within the report of proposed school closure with pupils being moved to a school with a lower conditioning grade. Capital investment and reform should be intertwined.</p> <p>Was it a conscious decision not to publish information which would have given communities and Members a clear understanding of the pathway of investment.</p> <p>Chair commented although the papers discussed new builds in the Llansantffraid / Llanfechain area and the Carreghoffa and Llandysilio area, this was not guaranteed and appeared a desperate situation.</p>	<p>Original proposal from Oct 2020 had an indicative timeline, which was the programme being accepted in Band B of the then 21st Century Schools Programme. Following the collapse of Dawnus the Councils expenditure on committed capital in that programme band had not exceeded the 80% mark, therefore the Authority were unable to advance projects within Band B The proposal was a recommitment to projects in Llanfyllin and Llansantffraid and with the opening up of the Sustainable Communities for Learning 9-year Plan in January 2024, part of our submission would be for those proposals to be included. At this stage there was no direct timeline, as important to get this stage through, then progress a proposed outline business case. The Authority was required to submit a new programme to WG by March 2024. Expected programme was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Years 1-3 projects that will reach full business case within 3years. • Years 4-6 projects being developed, progressing through statutory consultation. • Years 7-9 pipeline projects. <p>Capital investment in the Llanfyllin projects could be Year 4-6 or later years 7-9. Projects will be reviewed on a rolling 3-year basis as progression made. Information on capital investment would be noted in Cabinet.</p>
<p>The financial assessment within the</p>	<p>Cost savings within the documents</p>

<p>documentation shared did not show any cost savings for potential mergers, could the benefit be explained.</p> <p>Surely the cost savings and benefit analysis on the 4 schools in that area should be undertaken prior to any decision making on a single school.</p>	<p>relate to the closure proposals of Bryn Hafren. Today we are not discussing the potential merger of Llandysilio and Bryn Hafren.</p> <p>As plans are progressed and options and costings explored for what could be achieved, what the model would look like for Llandysilio, Carreghoffa and Arddleen.</p> <p>There would be a balance between what a small school could offer in terms of learner entitlement, where the main challenges were currently in the Llanfyllin catchment. The Council was under significant financial pressure, there was acknowledgement from the Strategy in 2020 that there are too many small schools in the county.</p> <p>Action was required where the main challenges were first. The overall position would be costed, there could be a number of options for the area mentioned, with difficulties arising that are currently unforeseen.</p> <p>This proposal was not necessarily about the financial cost saving, but about the learner entitlement and equity within the Llanfyllin area. There were issues in relation to surplus places, workloads of staff and leaders in the smaller schools to lead on all areas of the curriculum. There was value in the economy of scale regarding learner wellbeing, emotional support and the additional ALN pressures that was being felt within the system.</p>
<p>There is a Welsh medium Ti a Fi, but no continuation of the provision in the area, under the future plans assurance sought that there would be Welsh medium education within the current catchment of the 4 grouped schools, and the Llansantffraid and Llanfechain area.</p>	<p>Currently there was no follow-on Welsh medium education from the Ti a Fi into Cylch or early years primary provision, within the 4 schools group. There was a recommendation within the papers that options are to be explored along the A483 corridor. There was no mention within this paper of improving the Welsh medium provision in the Llansantffraid and Llanfechain, however those discussions could be held as the programme was progressed.</p>

<p>There have been comments made of a desire for Welsh medium education for individuals from Shropshire.</p>	<p>The distance from Oswestry to what was termed the A483 corridor schools, was no greater than the distances Powys learners currently travel for Welsh medium education. One of the options coming forward, probably during the consultation phase, if the Ysgol Bro Cynllaith proposal goes forward, would be to exploit a similar opportunity in that area.</p> <p>There would be a site in the north-east corner of Powys where the Council needs to bring forward Welsh medium provision. There are many issues to be discussed prior to any firm proposal for Welsh medium education being tabled.</p>
<p>Clarification sought on comment that there was a strong commitment to support Welsh children in Shropshire to receive a Welsh medium education, would this be funded by PCC.</p> <p>There have been no formal plans developed therefore presumptuous at best for this to be highlighted. The only formal plan presented would do great harm to the Welsh language on the border, proposed school closures could leave nearest schools would be in Oswestry, could confirmation be given that Powys would finance and transport pupils to their nearest suitable school in Shropshire should they so desire to attend there.</p>	<p>We are at the very early stages of exploring opportunities of the Marches Partnership offer. Learners of Powys are transferred cross border, which would allow for more detailed discussions on how this was managed with the view to have reciprocal arrangements in place.</p> <p>In respect of Ysgol Bro Cynllaith, it was quite simple as naming Llanrhaeadr ym Mochnant as the receiving school, any other schools chosen, would come under parental choice.</p>
<p>The Chair requested clarification on would Powys transport to nearest school, Bryn Hafren families have stated they would attend a school in Shropshire, likewise Ysgol Bro Cynllaith families stated Trefonnon as the preferred option, which Authority would incur costs.</p>	<p>The Council currently provides home to school transport in line with the policy. If eligible for free home to school transport it would be to your closest or catchment school.</p> <p>In the case of a named receiving school, the Council in the past has provided transport to a named receiving school, even if it was not their closest school, for the period of time that for the pupils of that closing school.</p> <p>The Council's wish was to keep all Powys learners in Powys and have the entitlement to the Welsh curriculum and the Welsh language.</p>
<p>The previous Cabinet issued a report to understand the impact of the border on</p>	<p>The review of border schools was not continued for a number of reason</p>

<p>Welsh medium education etc., has this report been finalised and published.</p>	<p>which included officer workload. The decision made was that border issues would be considered every time a catchment or school were reviewed.</p>
<p>There has to be consistency through the transformation programme, Scrutiny would like to revisit previous decisions on border schools, to examine if consistent in our policy to treat all schools equally.</p>	
<p>Bryn Hafren has increased links with the Welsh language as have a Welsh speaking teacher and all pupils are participating in the Urdd this year. Those links will be lost if parents who are employed in Shropshire transport those children on their commute rather than to a school in Powys a number of miles in the opposite direction.</p>	
<p>Has the suggestion of smaller schools coming under the management of a larger Urdd school been dismissed as not reflected in the report. Officers would have been aware of the option that had emerged at those school discussions to build on progress made, yet surprised there appears no consideration of such in the report shared given comment by the Head of Service that learner entitlement is a priority. Concern raised that all options should have been included at the commencement of the programme, as progression made non-viable options removed rather than adding options as consultation is progressed.</p>	<p>No, this was an option that emerged during discussions with the schools concerned as a proposal discussed but not fully quantified and brought forward for further evaluation. As part of the consultation exercise those schools could bring those proposals forward. The learner entitlement element required further exploration. Officers were not confident the information was sufficient to progress to offer a similar learning entitlement to the proposals outlined in the papers. This was the start point, there would be a consultation process where more detail and discussion will be raised, prior to any final decisions being made. To clarify the approach to optioning, the 3 schools specific circumstances have been reviewed along with their nearest schools, i.e., Ysgol Bro Cynllaith the options are linked with Llanrhaeadr, one option was to merge, another to come under the governance of Llanrhaeadr as a second site.</p>
<p>The maintenance backlog for one of the receiving schools was noted as £400k would the maintenance be completed within the 12-month window. It is imperative to have a clear timeline of investment in schools.</p>	<p>The Council has a duty to support, maintain and improve the condition of its buildings regardless of any school reorganisation progress. The backlog at Llanfechain has been recognised and would be a priority</p>

<p>Comment made that the figure for building maintenance backlogs was tantamount to a catastrophic failure, which needed to be addressed urgently, there has to be a clear concise plan for how to progress.</p>	<p>under the Schools Major Improvement Programme. Given the potential for a new build for Llanfechain / Llansantffraid, the pupils who attend Llanfechain school would have as good a learning environment as possible.</p>
<p>The Impact Assessments are very reliant on new builds, if new builds do not materialise the Impact Assessment should be changed.</p>	
<p>There was mention of Ysgol Llanrhaeadr ym Mochnant moving along the Welsh language continuum, which was essential, were the Governing Body in favour to move at pace.</p>	<p>In relation to Ysgol Llanrhaeadr ym Mochnant there had been difficulties in the recruitment of a Head Teacher. There have been very positive discussions with the Governing Body in regard to the Welsh language. The current ratio was 50:50, which would result in a lot of work to move the along the language continuum, in previous schools the ratios have been far greater in favour of the Welsh language at the statutory consultation stage.</p>
<p>Ysgol Llanfyllin has requested to move organically along the spectrum, with staff working hard to encourage more learners into the Welsh medium stream. Would there be an option for logic and reason to be used or any devise other than majoritarianism for the decision to be advanced.</p>	<p>The main issue was consent, The Council would not want to create situation where there was resentment and tension. In Ysgol Rhiw Bechan there has been a steady migration toward Welsh medium which would eventually lead to a transfer. There needs to be more work undertaken to understand reasons for parents choosing an English medium education and for them to be supported to change opinion. Where there were concerns of inability to support children through a Welsh medium education, programmes from Mentor Iaith for English speaking parents could assist. In keeping with proposals within the WESP, Llanrhaeadr would commence active progression along the continuum with a view to becoming a Welsh medium school, possibly over 2 sites with Ysgol Pennant, with one Head Teacher by the end of the 9-year programme.</p>
<p>How much support was there from the Council for the TROCHI scheme as</p>	<p>A key priority for Officers was to ensure there was a legacy following</p>

<p>fundamental to the progression of the Welsh language in our schools. The suggestion from Llanfyllin High School has been that a TROCHI experience be offered to Yr. 6 learners in the last half term to allow them to join a TROCHI stream in Yr.'s. 7 -8, could the school anticipate support particularly of a financial nature from Powys.</p>	<p>the Urdd Eisteddfod next year.</p> <p>Aware of the successful TROCHI pilot in Llanfyllin, the Schools Service have a team around the Welsh Language that can support. Have also been successful in recruiting on a secondment a part-time Welsh medium SIA to support our Welsh medium schools.</p> <p>At the Head Teacher development group, it has been shared that the Urdd was a springboard for further development of the Welsh language.</p>
<p>What lessons have we learned from the schools already moved or moving along the Welsh medium continuum, which could be used to inform parents of other areas, how has the transition been monitored and evaluated to feed into future situations. Do we use feedback effectively from parents, whose children have moved into a Welsh medium education.</p>	<p>There needs to be a period of engagement and dialogue with schools to ensure the schools and Governing Bodies are supportive of transition. To make clear to families what the benefits were of a Welsh medium education, and to commence from a very young age with a clear pathway of educational progression.</p> <p>Evidence was available from Bro Hyddgen, where numbers have not dropped since the move from dual stream to Welsh medium the support and monitoring from the Schools Service has continued.</p> <p>Utilising feedback from parents who have had children move along the Welsh medium continuum was something upon which we could improve.</p>
<p>The Chair invited Cllr Graham Breeze to voice local Member comment. The Portfolio Holder and Head of Schools Service were informed of the disappointment to the complete lack of consideration given to engagement from Welshpool High School in this Llanfyllin, North Welshpool Catchment Area Transformation programme, particularly as some of the schools noted in the reports, and at this meeting were in the Welshpool High School catchment area. Portfolio Holder was requested that if any changes were to be made to the Welshpool High School catchment area that the School and Governing body were to be fully consulted with detailed evidence of impact on school</p>	<p>As move forward exploring catchment areas, very aware that Carreghoffa, Llandysilio and Arddleen are in different catchment areas. In addition, if they do merge in the future the impact on feeder High Schools would have to be understood as well as the impact on numbers.</p> <p>The documentation provided outlines awareness of impact on both Welshpool and Llanfyllin High Schools should there be a changes of catchment for these 3 schools. Opportunities could present themselves should the schools merge, exploration of split High Schools catchments would be one of</p>

<p>numbers, loss, or gain, made available.</p>	<p>them.</p> <p>Assurance given that Welshpool HS would be part of the 3 schools consultation discussions, should there be an exploration of options.</p>
<p>Chair requested that the schools catchment maps and the school transport policy would have to be updated to be aligned with the proposals presented.</p>	
<p>Was the cost per pupil in the reports based on current funding formula or the actual cost per pupil.</p> <p>Within the SWOT analysis, specifically weaknesses and threats and how these would be addressed, there was no mention of flooding which can adversely affect the Bryn Hafren area for a number of weeks per annum.</p>	<p>The cost per pupil was derived from the Section 52 report for the 2022-23 financial year.</p>
<p>With previous transformation reports Committee had been given data in respect of pupil flow which has assisted to understand the demography of an area.</p> <p>The Impact Assessment has a reliance on new builds, these IA's should be removed as irrelevant, through discussion today 2 cohorts of Primary School children would have progressed to High School before new builds are realised.</p>	
<p>Committee requested more detail on the inclusion of Ysgol Meifod, as it had been stated consideration would be given following a new build at Ysgol Llanfyllin.</p>	<p>Every year there was opportunity for schools to request or opt for a catchment change, via the admissions process. Ysgol Meifod requested a change of catchment to Llanfyllin in 2021-22. The Transformation programme has highlighted that in the medium timeframe (Yr4-6) there would be a requirement to review the relationship for Ysgol Meifod, currently classed as a sustainable standalone school, therefore no immediate action was required.</p>
<p>Committee had advocated for pace of transformation, from reports and discussions, it must be noted that minimal change would occur in the term of this Council.</p>	

Scrutiny made the following observations:

- The Committee requested that:
 - Assurance be given that pupils displaced, due to closures of small schools, would not be subject to further moves as the Transformation programme progressed. It would be less disruptive if planned changes all happened as one.
 - Clarification of the projected future numbers data included new builds, and that the information would be provided to the Scrutiny Committee.
 - That schools are not closed prior to proper consideration given of capital investment programmes.
 - Lessons learned from previous schools moved on the Welsh Medium Continuum, that the monitoring and evaluation information be shared with parents, learners, and schools to assist with future transitions.
 - Information be provided to the Scrutiny Committee on all subjects taught through the Medium of Welsh and English from Yr7 to Yr13 in every school, and that this be made available to parents and learners at the commencement of every academic year.
 - A clear timeline of investment in schools be made available.
 - Assurances be given for the provision and commitment for Cylch and Ti a Fi in the catchment area, to promote the early years learning through the medium of Welsh.

- The Committee remained unconvinced about:
 - The delay in commencement of the Llanfyllin Catchment Review and required the differences in outline from the October 2020 paper be highlighted.
 - The SWOT analysis provided, as it does not take into consideration the extensive flooding that occurs in the Bryn Hafren area.
 - The provision of clear data, to understand the pupil flow, the whole geography of an area must be understood.
 - The actual pace of transformation.

- The Committee expressed concern:
 - That this process had not given a sufficient timeframe for all issues to be addressed, nor for all Local Members to be appraised of documents to provide adequate response to parents, staff, and learners alike.
 - That all reference to Capital expenditure has been removed. It is important for Members to be made aware of the timeframe and when investment will be made, to provide our communities with clarity of plans and commitment by the Local Authority.
 - Due to the catastrophic backlog in maintenance projects, can Cabinet provide assurance that pupils will not be moved from a closed school to a school that has a lower condition grading.
 - That the Impact Assessment provided was reliant on new build projects. In reality 2 cohorts of Primary School children could have progressed through their education before new builds were completed, therefore the Impact Assessment would be deemed irrelevant.
 - That the Transport Policy is not in line with the Transformation programme, for example cross-border issues. There has to be consistency and equity within our policy for all schools.

- Border schools need to have consistent transport policy across Powys, one that is not detrimental to Welsh Medium education. The Committee are unclear of School transport costs of transporting learners across the border.
- There were no timescales for the pace of transformation programmes, recorded within any of the document provided, which is essential to keep members parents and schools informed.
- If school closures are to happen, where and what is the capacity of other schools within the catchment area to receive these learners.
- That the school transport policy was not in line with the proposal documents and catchment area maps.
- New builds discussed need to have the capacity to deal with the proposals within the documents.
- Needs more information to local members, realise the impact on other schools in the catchment area.
- Of the lack of clarity within the proposals before the Committee of what the ultimate ambition is for Education within Powys.

Scrutiny's Recommendations to Cabinet were that:

- 1 The impact assessment provided was reliant on new build projects. In reality 2 cohorts of Primary School children could have progressed through their education before new builds were completed, therefore the Impact Assessment would be deemed irrelevant.
- 2 The border schools need to have consistent transport policy across Powys, one that is not detrimental to Welsh Medium education. The Committee are unclear of School transport costs of transporting learners across borders.
- 3 If school closures are to happen, what and where is the capacity of other schools within the catchment area?
- 4 The Committee require a response for the delay in commencement of the Llanfyllin Catchment Review and requested the differences in outline from the October 2020 paper be highlighted.
- 5 The process had not given a sufficient timeframe for all issues to be addressed, nor for all Local Members to be appraised of documents to provide adequate response to parents, staff, and learners alike.
- 6 Due to the catastrophic backlog in maintenance projects, can Cabinet provide assurance that pupils will not be moved from a closed school to a school that has a lower condition grading.
- 7 The school transport policy was not in line with the proposal documents and catchment area maps. There has to be consistency and equity within our policy for all Powys schools.
- 8 All reference to Capital expenditure has been removed. It is important for Members to be made aware of the timeframe and when investment will be made, to provide our communities with clarity of plans and commitment by the Local Authority.
- 9 That any new build would be required to have the capacity to deal with the proposals noted within the documents.
- 10 There were no timescales for the pace of transformation programmes, recorded within any of the documents provided, which is essential to keep Members, Governing Bodies, parents, and schools informed.

11 Of the lack of clarity within the proposals before the Committee and of what the ultimate ambition is for Education within Powys

7. | SCHOOLS TRANSFORMATION - YSGOL BRO CAEREINION

Background: -

Precis provided by the Portfolio Holder.

Officers gave a brief introduction to the proposal and referred to the following documents available to the Committee throughout the discussion:

- Cabinet Paper: Ysgol Bro Caereinion
- Appendix A – Option appraisal Ysgol Bro Caereinion Language
- Appendix B – Ysgol Bro Caereinion Impact Assessment

Points raised by the Panel:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members.
<p>Chair highlighted that the papers on Bro Caereinion were a Proposal and therefore require significant scrutiny by the Committee</p>	
<p>Following the letter of July 2023 that Bro Caereinion move along the move along the Welsh medium continuum in the near future. The pace has come as taken the Governing body and school by surprise with disappointment expressed of the lack of communication. Letter from the Governors requested the Primary phased reception intake completed initially, then 2 years later the Secondary phased intake. The Portfolio Holder met with Llanfyllin & Meifod and formally invited to meet Governors.</p> <p>The ambition for Bro Caereinion to become a Welsh language medium school is welcomed by the Governing body.</p> <p>In relation to the impact assessment (IA) (Pg4) referred to the proposal of a phased basis which minimised the impact on current pupils, citing impact was neutral. Given the approach would be Primary and Secondary phases completed concurrently was the impact assessment outcome still neutral.</p>	<p>It will remain as a neutral impact as additional support would be input via the Trochi for Yr. 7 pupils, as the area of most concern.</p> <p>Bro Caereinion has 21 pupils and Ysgol Rhiw Bechan 28 pupils who would be impacted by the transition into Welsh medium.</p> <p>The IA's provided were draft, as progress through the consultation period and beyond, documents would be updated.</p>
<p>When will the Trochi commence, there would be no point as of 1st Sept 2025, the Authority needs to give every learner impacted the opportunity to be emersed in the language, in addition teachers may wish to take a sabbatical to learn and become proficient in Welsh.</p>	<p>The Trochi needs to commence as soon as possible, as would any teacher sabbaticals required.</p> <p>Trochi has been reactive to pupils that have requested the service.</p> <p>The Trochi system would be required</p>

	<p>to adapt to become more proactive and supportive development. If the proposal achieved agreement, Trochi would have to be implemented prior to the Sept. 2025 date. The Service was currently recruiting to increase the offer, to allow need to be focussed where required</p>
<p>It was good to hear Ysgol Bro Caereinion was to move along the Welsh medium continuum. However, clarity required for pupils e.g., Ysgol Rhiw Bechan, which has 10 pupils in each Yrs. 4-6. If the learner or parents, who lived closer to Ysgol Bro Caereinion than Newtown but did not want a Welsh language education, would that learner have the right to have free transport to Newtown High School to receive an English medium education.</p>	<p>The learner would have entitlement to free transport for Welsh medium education even if not the closest high school. However, a learner would not be entitled to transport to an English-medium school if the Welsh medium school were nearest and the catchment school. Home transport does not differentiate between Welsh medium schools or dual stream schools. If a learner lived in Tregynon free home to school transport to Newtown would not be an entitlement as closest school was Bro Caereinion regardless of language. When the Transport policy was consulted upon and implemented, the English and Welsh provision across the County was not equitable. The policy in place was deliberate to try and access the bilingual offer at fewer settings across the County. In agreement that as the transformation proposals are progressed, the Transport policy would be continually reviewed, to close the gap in equitable provision as per commitment to the WESP. The plan would be to establish the school, then the transport policy could be updated and aligned.</p>
<p>Cllr Heulwen Hulme, Local Member comment was read out by the Chair: <i>People and families have moved to Tregynon because it is a dual stream school with pupils then naturally transitioning to Caereinion High School dual stream school. That is a choice parents have made to ensure their children continue to enjoy and embrace their education journey. With the proposal in front of us today, I can</i></p>	<p>In terms of Ysgol Rhiw Bechan, Ysgol Bro Caereinion, Ysgol Dafydd Llwyd, Ysgol Gwmraeg Y Trallwng the pupil numbers are significantly in favour of a Welsh medium education, which must be noted as both an opportunity and a success for the County. The Service does not underestimate the scope for change going forward would be considerable, however, outweighed by the benefits of a</p>

<p><i>assure you parents do not want to re-direct their English stream children from Caereinion H S to Newtown H S because</i></p> <p><i>1. They are rural kids, they are country kids, they feel more protected, and they have built-up long-lasting friendships from the reception class upwards. This is also seen as dividing families up, whereby 1 child in the Welsh stream and 1 child in the English stream but potentially going to different schools.</i></p> <p><i>I am also hearing of parents looking to move their English stream children from Ysgol Rhiw Bechan (YRB) to Berriew so that they go to Welshpool H S as against Newtown H S. I genuinely believe that YRB will lose numbers in the English stream which will impact on class sizes. They already have 3-year groups in one class due to low English numbers. This is not the way forward.</i></p> <p><i>Parents feel this decision is being forced upon them and please remember Welsh is not for every child. I know of 1 pupil who has switched from the Welsh to the English stream now this September, his mum reports he is a much happier and is a much more talkative child, something that has been lacking because he was struggling in the Welsh stream.</i></p> <p><i>Finally, I am aware YRB is in the Caereinion Cluster group, and I do have grave concerns that if this proposal goes forward, what will the impact be on YRB and will it remain a dual stream school.</i></p>	<p>bilingual education.</p> <p>Issues and concerns of families are appreciated, and the school and Service will continue to work with families to allay fears, if and as the proposal was progressed.</p>
<p>The terminology of Welsh and English medium should cease, as they were not of equivalent provision.</p> <p>Proposed the use of Bilingual Outcome/ Welsh Medium (BOWM) and English Monolingual Only (EMO) education.</p> <p>Learners of BOWM education have as good a command of the English language as anywhere else in the County, and the terminology would assist in providing an explanation to the public of the expected learner language outcomes.</p> <p>The difference of provision in a dual stream to a BOWM school is huge. If Welsh medium was chosen in a dual stream school, not all subjects are taught through Welsh, this is not communicated to</p>	<p>The provision of Welsh medium education and the offer of Welsh medium education was just that. The proposal opens up opportunities for partnerships between schools with a Welsh medium offering to work together and share resource and workforce.</p> <p>Another key area in the proposal allows for a fully bilingual workforce rather than a mix and match. The main issue was having the workforce, which currently was spread thinly. The WESP strand on workforce development has to be addressed across all phases.</p> <p>The proposal would strengthen the</p>

parents.

Committee must insist that Schools provide an audit of the lessons and resources that are offered and actually provided through the medium of Welsh.

The proposed move of Bro Caereinion at pace on the Welsh Language Continuum, has simplified and eliminated the problem as to the delivery expectations of learners and families.

There were no incentives for the dual stream Schools Management to explain clearly to parents the level of Welsh Medium education learners were or would be in receipt of. Parents need to be informed in summer terms what lessons were to be undertaken through the medium of Welsh for the upcoming academic year. History has shown that parents have been persuaded to attend certain dual stream schools because their child would learn Welsh. The actual outcome where budget was the driving force, was a disaster for Welsh medium education.

How many Dafydd Llwyd learners have moved to Secondary provision at Llanidloes rather than Ysgol Bro Caereinion as was intended to receive a more all-round Welsh Medium education.

Welsh medium offer across the North of the County, have listened to parents on the learner disadvantage of having no direct transition to Welsh Medium Secondary provision from Primary.

In terms of the curriculum offer the Service can capture the information provide evidence. Schools tend to work on their curriculum offer from April to July, and need to be mindful that external providers are utilised, which has to be explored around equity and the S-Goal.

Information on subject provision sits with schools not centrally, the Service receives information on the outcomes at KS4 &5. Agreement there was need to work with schools on communication support for KS4 options.

The proposal was implementing the WESP. The important aspect was the richness of the offer that our children would finish their education with both languages. The Organisation has a duty to ensure that the proposal was successful should it be agreed and taken forward so as not to collectively let down not to be let down another cohort of learners unable to access Welsh medium education across the whole curriculum.

In respect of the Welsh Medium Education Forum, they were *supportive of the proposal to change Ysgol Bro Caereinion's language medium. This is a long overdue development which has been discussed for several years and will ensure access to a full Welsh medium Secondary education for pupils in this part of Powys, enabling the Council to meet one of the main objectives of its WESP. This development would provide a clear pathway through Welsh medium education for pupils in the area from nursery through to Secondary and Post 16 provision. Welsh pre-school provision is already available at the Cylch Meithrin, and*

the Cylch Ti a Fi is also available for parents and young children. The Forum would expect this to lead to an overall growth in numbers choosing Welsh medium education in the area and a growth in the numbers continuing to receive when transferring to Secondary phase in particular. The Forum supports the proposal to start introducing the change in the language provision in the Primary and Secondary phases at the same time, which would enable the school to move along the continuum more quickly. This will ensure that access to a complete Welsh medium Secondary education can be provided earlier than if the proposal was only introduced in the Primary phase.

Some points were suggested that would need to be considered as the proposal moved forward: -

- *More information on the immersion support offer through TROCHI*
- *Whilst acknowledged the change of language provision to Welsh medium from September 2025. Welsh medium education should be promoted in the area in the lead up, with learners to be encouraged to take up Welsh medium education from September 2024.*
- *Form strong relationships with other Welsh medium schools in the area, particularly Ysgol Dafydd Llwyd and Ysgol Gymraeg Y Trallwyng. To encourage pupils from these schools to transfer to Secondary provision at Ysgol Bro Caereinion.*
- *The Council will need to revisit the transport policy to support the development to ensure the policy encourages access to full Welsh medium provision.*
- *It would be necessary to work with parents to make sure*

	<p><i>there was support for the development, particularly parents who had hoped there would be a Secondary development in the Severn Valley Area.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Collaboration between Ysgol Bro Caereinion and Ysgol Bro Hyddgen should be encouraged to enable both schools to expand the opportunities for pupils and to overcome difficulties with recruitment.</i> • <i>Any capital required to ensure the schools success would need to be considered when preparing the Council Strategic Outline Programme (SOP) for the WG 9-year Sustainable Communities for Learning investment programme, over the coming months.</i> <p>The provision of the breadth of offer in both language mediums. A piece of work has begun which includes the allocation of hours, the language of delivery as well as the workforce. The Service is really aware of the resilience within the workforce and risk in relation to delivery of Welsh medium subjects. The collaboration noted by the Welsh Medium Education Forum would help in building the resilience within the system.</p>
<p>The Options Appraisal Pg 14 showed numbers of learners within the catchment area. The numbers at Dafydd Llwyd are very good, yet the transition to Bro Caereinion does not equate. There remains a frustration that those learners then move to a dual stream school soon switch streams to English medium provision through Yrs. 7-9. Was there a plan to revisit the catchment area.</p>	<p>Ysgol Dafydd Llwyd has dual catchment as both Secondary schools were technically of the same language category. This proposal if approved would give rise to a statutory change, with catchments being revisited, as the language medium would be a materially differentiating factor.</p> <p>Dafydd Llwyd for a number of years had transitioned to Caereinion. In more recent years there has been a change where pupils have transitioned to a number of schools</p>

	<p>including Llanidloes and Newtown. Also, Ysgol Gwmraeg Y Trallwyng transition to Bro Caereinion and to Welshpool High School.</p> <p>Unless there were clear pathways to a dedicated Welsh medium provision that pattern would continue.</p> <p>Information will be made available prior to Cabinet next week.</p> <p>For Bro Caereinion to be successful the Authority needs to maximise the number of pupils transitioning and for Bro Caereinion to be the provider of choice</p> <p>The Primary feeder schools numbers to Bro Caereinion stand at 671. 105 taught through the English medium. 566 through the Welsh medium.</p>
<p>Would Ysgol Bro Caereinion have to close as dual stream and re-open as a Welsh Medium school.</p>	<p>No, the school would not have to close and re-open as proposal was to transition along a phased approach.</p>
<p>When the transport policy is updated, it would be important to have recognised the difference in experience between BOWM in a dual stream school as compared to Welsh medium setting, as would theoretically open doors for the furthest areas of the north of the county to allow those learners a fair experience. The downside would be the length of time being transported, or settle for the bi-lingual option provided by Llanfyllin or Llanidloes High Schools</p> <p>It was incredibly important that the education provision through the Welsh medium were to be improved radically in Llanfyllin and Llanidloes. For the number of children currently in Welsh medium Secondary education, there are sufficient teachers within the County, just spread between schools. How would the cooperation between school be envisaged, would there be the potential of central contracts i.e., Welsh medium North Powys employed over 3 sites, through the use of technology undertaking remote teaching.</p>	<p>The cooperation between schools and how this would be progressed requires further exploration. Once the service has gathered the information previously requested by Scrutiny, the expertise across the Authority could be reviewed. Powys remains a leader in the e-Ysgol with exploration being undertaken at provision of the offer at Key Stage 4.</p>
<p>Bro Caereinion if proposal approved would be set up as a BOWM school. What is the danger to Bro Caereinion's sustainability if Llanfyllin and Llanidloes High Schools</p>	<p>There would be greater ambition than one Welsh medium Secondary school in the county. If Bro Caereinion were successful, delivering on the Councils</p>

<p>develop their Welsh Medium offer. Would there be a possibility for Bro Caereinion to be re-categorised as a North Montgomeryshire Welsh medium provider with responsibility for the Welsh medium provision over Llanfyllin and Llanidloes to ensure a fairer deal. This model would enable Welsh medium education to be geographically dissipated to ensure it is not constrained to Bro Caereinion with easy accessibility from Llangurig to Llansilin.</p>	<p>commitment to the WESP, the outcome should be increased demand to warrant additional schools over and above the current WESP.</p>
<p>In order for Bro Caereinion remain sustainable, the catchment of Ysgol Dafydd Llwyd to be wholly within that of Ysgol Bro Caereinion would be changed by the Authority. There was still concern that cohort after cohort would continue to be let down, the ambition of the Portfolio Holder was acknowledged this needs to be added to the WESP which could be updated at any point. Many of Powys' schools are on the edges of sustainability what was the footprint of Powys High Schools, currently there are on 13 sites are all sites sustainable going forward.</p>	<p>Catchment would be revisited once the moved proposal, if approved by Cabinet, was progressed. With regard the school footprint, a number of issues are being reviewed. The current policy remains at 13 sites. As in a review on Welsh Medium provision and the impact upon the WESP and wider section. There would be impact on the use of schools as to where learners attend for English medium education. No changes planned for the 13 sited provision. There was ongoing work to review and look at the financial positions which could inform changes, any changes however would require cross party working. No timeframe given in regard to any review on the 13 sites as have current proposals to progress.</p>
<p>Has any consideration been given to an awareness campaign aligned with the proposal to demonstrate the benefits of Welsh medium education, using evidence from previous learners to parents.</p>	<p>Officers have been requested to produce an engagement and activity plan around the Urdd Eisteddfod, to promote the benefits of Welsh medium education across North Powys. As the proposal moves forward there would have to be specific targeted events within the catchment to assist parents understanding of all the opportunities available. There is a link on the Powys website Destination Bilingual, commitment made to promote and run that campaign again in light of comments made.</p>
<p>There was no forward capital expenditure information within the documentation, is there capital investment planned.</p>	<p>The new programme will be submitted early spring 2024. One of the criteria for the new Sustainable Communities</p>

	<p>for Learning programme from WG was the development of Welsh medium education. It was acknowledged that Bro Caereinion requires investment and would be looked at as the capital programme was prepared.</p>
<p>Communication was crucial, it has to be clear comprehensive and timely. Bro Caereinion was subject to major upheaval when the All through school was established. If the proposal is approved, the Portfolio Holder and officers were invited to meet with and collaborate with the school and Governing body.</p>	

Scrutiny made the following observations:

- The Committee welcomed:
 - That the Governing Body were in favour of the move along the Welsh Medium continuum.

- The Committee requested that:
 - The Portfolio Holder arrange to meet with the Governing Body in the near future.
 - The intake for the Secondary phase be extended from 2025 to 2027, to allow for the progression of English medium students both in Ysgol Bro Caereinion and feeder schools. This would align with the governing body request to allow more time for learners and staff to adjust along the Welsh Medium continuum.
 - Clarity be provided whether the plan was for Ysgol Rhiw Bechan to move along the Welsh language continuum.
 - Clarity for those feeder schools where pupils are taught through the medium of English, which high school would they receive free transport to.
 - An audit be undertaken of the number of lessons and resources provided through the medium of Welsh in dual stream schools. Parents also to be informed when timetables are formulated.
 - Information be provided to Scrutiny Committee of the number of learners from Dafydd Llwyd that cease their education through the medium of Welsh and it what year i.e., Yr.7, Yr. 9, Yr. 12.
 - The catchment secondary school for Dafydd Llwyd be reviewed as Bro Caereinion would be the only Welsh Medium High School in Northeast Powys.
 - The Local Authority review and explore the possibility of having central contracts for Welsh Medium teachers, allowing for further utilisation of technology and remote teaching techniques, as vitally important that the Welsh Medium education provision in Powys is improved dramatically.

- The Committee remained unconvinced about:

- The scheduled commencement of the TROCHI support in September 2025, should be implemented as soon as possible, to allow every learner and staff member to be immersed in the language at the earliest opportunity.
 - The Local Authority's ability to sustain and maintain 13 high school sites across Powys.
 - That the necessary Officer and financial support would be implemented in a timely manner to support this unique journey for North Powys and Bro Caereinion.
- The Committee expressed concern:
 - That there was no capital expenditure information available to Committee, to attract learners, schools have to be in receipt of capital investment, for maintenance and building requirements to attain and sustain flagship status.
 - Of the sustainability of Bro Caereinion if Llanfyllin and Llanidloes develop their offer of Welsh Medium Education in the future.
 - The school transport policy was not in line with the proposal documents and catchment area maps. There has to be consistency and equity within our policy for all Powys schools.

Scrutiny's Recommendations to Cabinet were that:

- 1 The scheduled commencement of the TROCHI support in September 2025, should be implemented as soon as possible, to allow every learner and staff member to be immersed in the Welsh language at the earliest opportunity.
- 2 The school transport policy was not in line with the transformation documents and catchment area. There has to be consistency and equity within our policy for all Powys schools.
- 3 There was no capital expenditure information available to the Committee. To attract learners, schools have to be in receipt of capital investment, for maintenance and building requirements to attain and sustain flagship status.
- 4 That the necessary support would be implemented in a timely manner to support this unique journey for North Powys and Bro Caereinion.
- 5 The sustainability of Bro Caereinion, if Llanfyllin and Llanidloes develop their offer of Welsh Medium Education in the future, be secured.
- 6 The catchment secondary school for Dafydd Llwyd be reviewed as Bro Caereinion would be the only Welsh Medium High School in Northeast Powys.

8.	WORK PROGRAMME
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To be discussed at the next meeting.

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