

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LEARNING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD AT BY ZOOM ON TUESDAY, 30 JANUARY 2024**

PRESENT

County Councillor R G Thomas (Chair)

County Councillors A W Davies, B Davies, DW Meredith, D Bebb, G Preston,
S McNicholas, C Robinson, K Chedgzoy, Mrs S. Davies, Mrs M Evitts, P Roberts and
D A Thomas

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| 1. | APOLOGIES |
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Apologies for absence were received from Councillor L Roberts, G Morgan.

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| 2. | DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST |
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There were no declarations of interest from Members relating to items for consideration on the agenda.

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| 3. | DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP |
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The Committee did not receive any disclosures of prohibited party whips which a Member has been given in relation to the meeting in accordance with Section 78(3) of the Local Government Measure 2011.

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| 4. | DRAFT 2024-2025 BUDGET |
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General

The Committee noted, observed, or requested that:

- The impact assessments provided were not satisfactory, with little detail to enable the Committee to give constructive challenge, particularly around the Schools Delegated Budget.

Leisure and Education

The Committee noted, observed, or requested that:

- There was an apparent lack of equity in Leisure facilities for pupils across the County, and the ability for learners to be transported easily, Officers agreed that transport requirements needed to be better understood.
- The impact on learners on the potential reduction in leisure services would not be known for some time.
- The savings of the Leisure services budget reductions were interlinked with the Sustainable Powys programme and elements once defined would be brought to the relevant Scrutiny Committee, therefore the Committee felt the service lacked a distinct vision.
- Schools close to the border may lose learners from Powys Leisure facilities to Shropshire or Herefordshire without appropriate transportation provision.
- As Freedom Leisure had not yet signed the adjustment to the contract agreement, concerns were raised by the Committee of what assurances could be given that the cost reductions would be realised.
- The Impact Assessment was disappointing as it did not refer to the Education Minister's focus on aspirations for all.

- Concerns were raised that there was no acknowledgement of multi-able and talented learners within the Delegated Budget.

Welsh Medium Education

The Committee noted, observed, or requested that:

- Further information be provided on the funding of TROCHI immersion across Powys, the current £100k covers little more than the staffing resources. Budget drives results and outcomes, without financial support, schools are powerless to provide learners the opportunity to be taught in the language of their choice.
- The Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee would form a TROCHI working group to review the existing provision, development, and map progress.

PRU (Pupil Referral Unit)

The Committee noted, observed, or requested that:

- It was important to establish the changes of the ALNET (Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal) Act and measure the impact on both schools and learners to feed into a remodelling of the PRUs.
- Information was provided by Officers on the timescales, capacity, occupation, and transportation.
- Concerns were raised that schools would not have sufficient budget nor skills to deal with pupils remaining within their home school rather than receive provision through a PRU.
- A clear risk in relation to the cost reduction and whether it would be delivered within the fiscal year, given that remodelling would be undertaken.

Schools Delegated Budget

The Committee noted, observed, or requested that:

- Officers gave the latest cumulative position of £500k in Quarter 3 with a projected cumulative position for 2025-26 of £1m.
- Schools In depth reviews had been positive in sourcing savings, with further reviews scheduled after the February half term and the schools funding formula had been processed.
- The 4.2% increase in the delegated funding, which was welcomed, it was noted the figure was less than other service areas.
- They be informed of the date and amount of the Welsh Government grant funding for Foundation Phase and 16+ provision award.
- Assurance sought that as a result of the £2.5m shortfall, schools would not see a worsening position over the financial year.
- Assurance from the Cabinet that an update is provided to the Committee on the management of the school maintenance backlog.
- Explanation given on the Transformation programme capital monies which stood at £46m 2023-24 and at £12m 2024-25.
- The Capital programme Strategic Outline Case to be presented to Welsh Government in March would outline projects to be afforded within the 9-year rolling programme, and what approach would be appropriate in each case i.e., remodelling, new build, design and build or off-site construction. Assurance given by Officers that the Transformation programme had not slowed.
- There was a concern due to the proposed budget shortfall of £2.5m would result in staffing reductions which would impact on curriculum delivery, producing poor learner outcomes.
- To provide the Committee with further information on the schools' delegated budget, which was proposed to have a shortfall of £2.5m, leaving schools with

desperate decisions to make, undoubtedly through staff reductions, due to the lack of reserves.

| Scrutiny's Recommendation to Cabinet | Accept (plus Action timescale) | Partially Accept (plus Rationale, Action & timescale) | Reject (plus Rationale) |
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| <p>1. To review the impact on the reduction of the Leisure Services Budget and the impact this would have on vacant slots, learners, and schools, including the offer of wet-side activities and transport requirements.</p> | | <p>A more complete Impact Assessment will be completed in collaboration with schools, freedom leisure and transport for the second year savings. This work is already underway and will be completed by 1st April. Assurance is given that curriculum requirements will be maintained when considering the implementation of any change.</p> | |
| <p>2. Assurances sought from Cabinet that the Welsh language crisis within schools would be addressed urgently. The Impact Assessments provided stated there was no impact on the Welsh language, which was untrue.</p> | | | <p>We don't accept that there is a Welsh Language Crisis in Powys schools. During the last two years Estyn inspections in our Welsh medium settings and primary schools have been positive. There are no Welsh medium provisions in any form of Estyn follow up in this sector. We have enhanced Welsh medium provision in primary schools with the implementation of a Welsh medium stream in Ysgol y Cribarth and looking to develop secondary provision in line with the WESP over the course of the coming year.</p> |
| <p>3. To re-consider the impact the reduction in PRU (Pupil Referral Units) would have on school budgets and staff well-being, with learners remaining at their home school. And reflect on vulnerable learners having to travel long distances.</p> | | <p>The re-alignment of the pupil referral service is focussed on continuing to deliver a high-quality service in a different way – that is aligned with the central tenets of a 'Sustainable Powys' and the wider schools transformation programme. To support the evolving needs of children and young people in Powys, the service needs to be increasingly agile, flexible and cohesive across the County. Realised saving would be as a result of consolidating the service onto one site and may include potential savings related to utilities, travel costs (staff travel to learners), satellite provision and outreach support. In addition, the service is undertaking a thorough</p> | |

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| | | evaluation and review of the previous SEN/ALN Strategy, that is fit for purpose for learners in a world following a global pandemic and cost of living crisis. There have been no decisions about location of a site, and the full business case is being written that will include specific figures which will include the travel arrangements. | |
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| 5. | REPORTS |
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As item 4

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| 6. | IMPACT ASSESSMENTS |
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As item 4

County Councillor R G Thomas (Chair)