

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LEARNING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD BY ZOOM ON FRIDAY, 9 FEBRUARY 2024**

Present:

County Councillor Gwynfor Thomas (Chair)

County Councillors: L Roberts, D Bebb, AW Davies, B Davies, G Morgan, S
McNicholas, G Preston & C Robinson

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

Officers: Emma Plamer CEO, Lynette Lovell Dir. Of Education and Children's
Services, Georgie Bevan, Head of Schools Service, Sarah Quibell, Service
Manager for Education Support Services, Eurig Towns Service Manager for
School Improvement, Cressy Murphy Service Manager for Secondary School
Improvement & Chris Davies Service Manager for Curriculum for Wales.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from:

Committee Members

County Councillors:- D Meredith & D Bebb

Portfolio Holders

P Roberts, Cabinet Member for a Learning Powys

D Thomas, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation

Jackie Charlton – Cabinet Member for A Greener Powys – Council Business

Officer:

Jane Thomas Dir. Of Corporate Services.

2. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

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

3. DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP

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

4. MINUTES

Documents Considered:

- Minutes 17.11.2023 and 13.12.2023

Minutes agreed by Committee members present as a true and accurate
reflection of the meetings and ratified accordingly by the Chair.

5. JOINT INSPECTION OF CHILD PROTECTION ARRANGEMENTS (JICPA)

Documents considered:

The Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW), His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) and Education and training inspectorate for Wales (Estyn) published report and a presentation provided at the meeting by the Schools Service and later circulated to Committee members.

Background:

Summary by the Schools Services provided as follows:

- Safeguarding organisations in Powys have systems and arrangements in place for effective joint working when children are considered at risk of abuse or neglect.
- Senior leaders in the local authority, police and health boards demonstrated a joint approach to regional safeguarding arrangements.
- Leaders and managers have established a highly positive culture of joint multi-agency workings.
- Effective information sharing.
- Useful regional threshold guidance.
- Shared understanding.
- Opportunities for partnership working are positively taken up.
- Schools work well with a wide range of services to support children. Pupil wellbeing and safety is a high priority across all schools.
- However as is the case across the whole of Wales, the ability to recruit and retain key staff is impacting on children's safeguarding arrangements exacerbated by the high demand on services and increasing complexity of needs.

Points raised by the Panel:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members.
It was noted in the presentation that there were issues with staff retention, what mechanisms did PCC have to ensure the right staff were in place	This was an overall summary including other Service Areas of the Council. This particular point was in reference to the Children's Services, which is not just a local but a national issue across the UK.
Were any issues noted of relationships between schools and agency social work staff, due to the latter's lack of understanding	General agreement from the schools services officers present.
	Director of Education commented and offered assurance that overall, in terms of well-being for Education, the outcomes were noted as strong. The Service would include in the Action Plan safeguarding arrangements around the fixed term exclusions were robust.

<p>Assurance sought that though there was good attendance across multi-agency partners was there also consistency with attendance at those attending.</p>	<p>This point was in terms of school staff attendance at meetings involving child protection arrangements, Child Protection Case Conferences (CPCC), Core Group meetings and that school staff were fully engaged and involved.</p>
<p>Request for further information around where the responsibility lay for meeting with Electively Home Educated (EHE) children</p>	<p>The responsibility for contacting the EHE learners falls to the Education Welfare Officers (EWO) who form part of the Schools Service support. Parents are not required to engage, however the Service, were proactive in offering appointments and visits to suit the needs of each individual family. The latest Welsh National annual figures showed that only 2% of EHE in Powys had not been in receipt of, despite attempts, a visit / contact.</p>
<p>Can assurance be given that the Schools Service was aware of all EHE learners across Powys, what was the current figure of Powys EHE learners.</p>	<p>We can assure Committee that the Service was confident in the number of EHE learner across Powys, the figure currently stood at approximately 350 individual learners. The Service has undertaken a significant amount of work over the last 2 years as there was a rise during the COVID pandemic of EHE, and to ensure these learners are in receipt of a suitable education.</p>
<p>Reference was made to the Fixed Term Excluded learners within the report. Can clarity be given if the (Pupil Referral Unit) PRU was visited within this Inspection, as felt it would have played an important role for those most vulnerable of children who do not for whatever reason remain in mainstream education. There were instances whereby multiple failed attempts have been made to secure places for learners into the PRU or a supportive environment, which has resulted in those learners missing years of education. Were the children randomly selected or selected due to any risk category.</p>	<p>The Inspectors had requested specific focus on children under Child Protection arrangements, and then identified a number of children for the deep dive of their case files. The selection was made by the Inspectorate randomly from the current cases held by Children's Services, initial cases were approx. 200, brought down to 20, with 10 looked at for one aspect of the inspection and 6 for the deep dive. In terms of the Fixed Term Exclusions there was already a piece of work being undertaken for the 2 schools that have the highest numbers, with a leading national expert working with the Pastoral leads for the schools concerned, delivering training on specific elements i.e. de-escalation and more challenging behaviour. A review of the Integrated Business Plan (IBP) has followed from the JICPA, rather</p>

	<p>than waiting for the Action Plan to be formulated, as well as collaborative input from the Children's Services Head of Service.</p>
<p>With the increase in the number of EHE has there been:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Increased pressure on the EWO's What is the frequency of contact with EHE learners. 	<p>The Schools Service reviewed the model in recognition of the increased numbers of EHE Learners to ensure continuity in the provision of support and communication. Parents are required provide an annual report and contact is tailored to individual family's needs.</p>
<p>What were the numbers of Fixed Term Excluded learners.</p>	<p>The percentage of learners was known, and the service has identified the specific schools with the highest numbers. The Service is focussed on any trends i.e. ALN and learners experiencing deprivation are often, not always, linked.</p>
<p>There were many linkages to trends, however there was still not a clear understanding of how the remodelling of the PRU would benefit or impact learners. The Chair agreed that information and data could be included within the proposed Joint Scrutiny.</p>	<p>It was acknowledged that in the past there has been a lack of data, however, this had now changed, for example, fixed term exclusions and attendance was information that could be provided There would also be a focus on FTE moving forward by Estyn. The Service would be open to the Scrutiny Committee on format of information required.</p>
<p>Could the ALN strategy encompassing data and statistics be brought to Scrutiny Committee in the future.</p>	<p>The ALN strategy has formed part of the ongoing work, inclusive of behaviour. Since the pandemic there was a differing picture within schools and the LA has been noted as having strengths in processes and systems by Estyn. The Head of the PRU provides the FBA training and various elements of work within schools therefore closely aligned. Wherever possible the best learning environment and experience for the majority of learners was to remain within mainstream education.</p>
<p>The phase used "most" schools would appear to conclude that not all schools were keeping accurate records, how was this being addressed.</p>	<p>The Inspectorate did not visit all schools, however it is a message that would be continually reinforced for the appropriate maintenance of safeguarding records.</p>
<p>Slight frustration noted that the report was before Committee prior to all action plans being formulated and review completed by the Regulators. Requested that the Action Plans would be presented to this Committee</p>	

<p>and the Health and Care Scrutiny Committee with possibly a Joint Scrutiny meeting scheduled.</p>	
<p>In reference to the Welsh Government removal of the School Beat Cymru programme from their budget, which was a strong link between schools and Dyfed Powys Police (DPP) which engendered confidence in the relationships between young people and the police, was this reviewed as part of the report. What was the Schools Services perspective of the impact the reduction in funding would have. The Chair added that the reduction of the funding would not have been made available at the time of the Inspection nor writing of the report, it would be hoped that any future inspections and report would note the impact.</p>	<p>The programme funding was not commented upon within the report, whilst the programme was discussed. The School Beat Cymru programme was valued within Schools and was used to evidence partnership working within the JICPA. The impact of the reduction in funding was yet to be seen.</p>
<p>Chair expressed on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee his praise and thanks to those involved in the JICPA, the report provided by the Regulators is positive in its remarks in relation to Education.</p>	<p>The Director of Education and Children’s Services responded with thanks to the Committee for their comments which reflected the vast amount of work and good practice input by both the Education and Children’s Services.</p>

6.	WORK PROGRAMME
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Comments:

- Impact on partnership working between DPP and Schools due to the reduction in Welsh Government Schools Beats Cymru funding to be reviewed.
- Possible Joint Scrutiny meeting in relation to the Action Plan in response to the JICPA Report with the Health and Care Scrutiny Committee.
- ALN to be reviewed periodically in line with the implementation of the ALNET (Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal) Act.

County Councillor R G Thomas (Chair)