

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
JOINT LEARNING AND SKILLS & HEALTH AND CARE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEES
HELD BY ZOOM ON
WEDNESDAY 13TH NOVEMBER 2024**

Present:

County Councillor Gwynfor Thomas (Chair)

County Councillors: L Roberts, A W Davies, A Davies, G E Jones, C Masefield, C Robinson, A Jenner, A Williams, D Edwards, B Breeze, J Ewing, G Preston, L Brighouse and C Walsh.

Co-opted Member: 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

Jackie Charlton Cabinet Member for a Greener Powys

Officers: Dr Richard Jones Director of Education, Anwen Orrells Head of School Improvement & Learning, Marianne Evans Head of Transforming Education, Anne Phillips Interim Head of Finance, Mari Thomas Deputy Head of Finance (Strategic Finance), Nancy Owen Finance Manager, Simon Anderson Schools Improvement Manager Schools Service.

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| 1. | APOLOGIES |
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Apologies for absence were received from:

County Councillors B. Davies, S McNicholas, G Morgan, A Evans

Co-Opted Member: Kathryn Chedzoy

Officer: E Palmer Chief Executive.

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| 2. | DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST |
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There were no Declarations of Interest from Members relating to items to be considered on the agenda.

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| 3. | DISCLOSURE OF PARTY WHIPS |
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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.

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| 4. | ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS AND INCLUSION STRATEGIC PLAN |
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Presentation provided by Simon Anderson.

| Points raised by the Panel: | Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members. |
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| <p>Committee were impressed with the vision and the amount of information shared within the document, but were concerned how closely this vision was linked with the schools transformation programme, which was not moving at pace, or linked with Post 16 Education that seemed to be falling way behind. How could schools work with (Additional Learning Needs) ALN pupils when the basics were not in place.</p> <p>Concern was raised of the implementation costs to be incurred for the vision shared in the documentation and presentation.</p> | <p>The Transformation and ALN teams have been working closely. The Transformation Strategy is the overarching strategy, where the Inclusion strategic plan aims to deliver part of the overall strategy, through key pieces of work, for example Post 16 in ALN workstream 3. Individual areas could not be looked at in isolation and assurance was given that school reorganisation and school service were fundamental parts of the Transformation Programme and ALN is integral to each part.</p> <p>Costs were not just about savings that could be achieved but costs may be incurred ensuring Powys has the right programme for our learners. In addition savings may be identified as work progressed.</p> |
| <p>The Chair on behalf of the committee requested reassurance that under the Transformation Programme all of this can be linked, the Post 16 papers have been delayed for a considerable time and this raises concern.</p> | <p>Transformation Programme is a published programme of works, currently in Wave 2 and was governed by the Transforming Education Programme Board. Below that are various workstreams that included all relevant officers. It was important that the strategic plan fits within the programme without contradiction.</p> <p>A new WG School Organisation Code has recently been published for consultation, and ALN was highlighted as an integral expectation of LA's Schools Transformation programmes.</p> |
| <p>The Committee requested more information in respect of the ALN Early Years provision. Settings were in the midst of applications and financial implications from 2025 could impact on their continuing to operate. Transition from Early Years to primary and the provision for parents was fundamental, if not correct, those young children could be lost from the beginning, there was no evidence of either within this document.</p> | <p>Officers in agreement that the Early intervention and transition into Primary was so important and was a focus within the strategy in workstream 1.</p> <p>The ALN birth to 5 years team also worked with 3+ settings</p> <p>Part of the Strategic Plan was to invest in transition officers at all stages, these dedicated officers would support settings, children, young people and families through the process. The Schools Service</p> |

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| | <p>continues to work with Social Care teams, who provide opportunities for parents to learn new skills, and on supporting parenting strategies for example the Take 3 parenting agenda with the Youth Service.</p> <p>The service empathised and agreed that Early Years provision required looking as a holistic approach to service wide-working work and not in isolation.</p> <p>The bids for Sept. 2025 are being reviewed to ensure that the location, availability and capacity was appropriate for rural and urban areas alike across Powys.</p> |
| <p>Question raised in relation to exclusion data, how had school budgets over the last few years impacted on that area.</p> <p>In Workstream 3 of the report there was an indicative timeframe Nov 2024 to Jan 2025, further information requested on this and given the amount of work involved with the possibility of potential long-term savings, has there been consideration for invest to save projects.</p> | <p>There was no specific data available but would certainly look at whether there was any correlation.</p> <p>In terms of the indicative timeline Workstream 1 was concerned with service improvement and would run throughout.</p> <p>If approval granted for de-registration of the PRU into 2 separate entities within Workstream 2, this would be actioned in Jan 2025. Further detail and consultation is required for Workstream 3, which is envisaged to take approximately 6 months. Results will be brought back to Scrutiny.</p> |
| <p>It would be helpful to know the numbers of children in receipt of Children's Services support who were identified as having additional learning needs and the breakdown of where those children are within the education system, e.g. mainstream, Elective Home Educated, PRU.</p> <p>Able and talented pupils with ALN are not mentioned within the document have these individuals been identified within the service and how was their progress measured to ensure they continue on their projected trajectory.</p> <p>Further information was requested on the practical differences between one PRU to two and for Workstream 3 have discussions been held with stakeholders involved in the North Powys Well-Being project and any similar collaborations within the south of the County.</p> | <p>The numbers of children with ALN in receipt of Social Care services would have to be brought back to Scrutiny.</p> <p>Since the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales, our clusters of schools are working more closely planning for progression from 5-18years with transition plans in place. All schools look at different groups of children and how do different groups progress, the pace and their level of expectation, where learners are more able and talented, they are given further challenging work and opportunities such as debating and STEM challenges. Learners who have dyslexia or dyspraxia may still be within both groups and given those further opportunities as mentioned. Currently decisions made for and by the PRU has to be made for both</p> |

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| | <p>sites. The individuals they are supporting have different needs. By deregistering the single provision and developing two individual provisions the focus would be on those needs in those areas as highlighted by Estyn. Estyn would undertake inspections at the individual settings rather than a whole PRU approach as previously, making reports more relevant. Assurance given that PTHB and Social Care colleagues were actively involved in discussions on the North Powys Well-Being Hub.</p> |
| <p>A question was raised in regard to Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) and request for further information to that touched upon within the report.</p> | <p>This was looked at holistically, what were the root causes of anxiety and from a pupil centred need focus. This could involve online courses with a view to transitioning back into mainstream education where appropriate or a possibility within the PRU for a "Ready to Learn" class, involving socialisation skills.</p> |
| <p>It was noted that aspiration came with a cost, a lot of the information held in the report had been heard before under different formats, if compared these aspirations to the current provision, what would be missing. There has been huge investment over 5-6 years into Children's Services with the assumption that collaboration with Education on Early Intervention and the Health Board formalising and implementing processes and strategies had been undertaken. Was there a date for the implementation of the separate PRU's model given the capacity issues. Given the difference in need between the two PRU's was the entrance thresholds different, surely all children across Powys should have access to the service provision.</p> | <p>Assurance given that collaboration and partnership working was undertaken, but to note that ALN demand within the system was the highest it had ever been. There was national work ongoing to review how LA's could be supported to meet the current need. This paper expands the collaboration and partnership working to enable a response to local need in a more precise and resource targeted manner. As PRU is one service there was one entrance threshold, this could be reviewed and made bespoke to the individual needs of either community if deregistration or implementation of separate provisions agreed.</p> |
| <p>Comment had been made on the provision of hubs in the 4 core areas, could committee be informed as to how many specialist centres were across the county and the number of pupils and vacancies there were currently.</p> | <p>The document would need to be revised on the actual number of hubs. There were currently a range of specialist centres connected to mainstream schools, within the documents it states 15 Primary and 4 Secondary specialist centres with approximately 12 spaces per centre. Centres were originally established</p> |

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| | <p>for individuals with moderate learning difficulties; however, it was now accepted that the best education provision was in mainstream education with a differentiated curriculum. The cohort for the specialist centres has changed and was recognised within the strategy.</p> |
| <p>This document has been developed under the Sustainable Powys programme, and the principles described today are different to the document.</p> | <p>The strategy works towards the Principles of Sustainable Powys of a greener, fairer and more equitable provision. At present we cannot focus on 4 key areas as the analysis has not been undertaken. Sustainable Powys place-based planning was not about cost savings but ensuring that service provision met the needs of communities, assurance given that the Service were reviewing the Sustainable Powys framework not only on place-based planning but travel time for pupils with ALN.</p> |
| <p>It was recognised that delivery was lacking, and whilst commendable that this strategy aimed to meet pupils individual needs, however it must be acknowledged that school staff feel they were not listened to and there was no evidence available that this strategic plan could be achieved.</p> | <p>Some schools had informed they were struggling and not coping, others have advised that the support provided is correct. We have held discussions with the ALNCO's who had provided feedback. The blanket view that the Education Service did not listen to schools needed to be challenged, as the Service did work well with our schools and absolutely listened to school leaders and staff and were determined not to have a dislocation between strategy and policy and what was required at school level. Assurance offered that the Education Service would continue to engage with our stakeholders in supporting our schools.</p> |
| <p>There was mention within the document of an impact assessment, what was the timeline of that assessment and what it linked to. The budget savings were estimated at £189k, have any grants been considered as these were usually fixed term and may increase financial pressures.</p> | <p>The Well-being and Access to Well-Being support would be enhanced through this strategic plan, to support learners in their mainstream school. CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) have worked on an in-reach model which has been effective and would be a first contact to deliver or suggest strategies. Grants are often relied upon, Education grants being more stable</p> |

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| | <p>for a period of 12 months and recurring, yet the Service is well aware of the risk involved.</p> |
| <p>Given the projected revenue savings from the PRU changes, what specific financial safeguards would be in place to ensure cost savings measures do not compromise the quality of support or accessibility for high needs learners. What process would be implemented to gather input from learners, their families, staff and other stakeholders on the effectiveness of the PRU model and how would this shape improvements moving forward.</p> | <p>In terms of stakeholder engagement, there would be a model of focus groups in collaboration with PTHB working with school councils, head teachers. We would continue to review the Parent Voice in Wales to obtain views and gain parental views.</p> |
| <p>Explanation requested of the Service for the change in the PRU position and the savings included in the budget 2024-25 to those savings noted within the report. The grant expenditure and re-alignment of dual registration were changes in how monies were utilised not savings and the staff resource was the only real saving. Were schools aware that there could be changes in the charge to their budgets for pupils accessing the PRU.</p> | <p>The decision to change the budget savings for 2024-25 around the remodelling of the PRU service and the consolidation onto one site. New departmental leads realised that the geography of Powys would not lend itself to a one-site model, coupled with the increased travel costs that would be incurred. Given the figures stated were considerable, the Service has had to move the budget savings forward to 2025/26 and 2026/27, with £135k from grant expenditure, realignment of the dual registration element of the formula and staff resource being achievable in this financial year. Where a school was in receipt of funding per pupil at Secondary Key Stage 3, there would be adjustments made, based on the regulations in place for an element of that, depending on how much a pupil was accessing the PRU.</p> |
| <p>The Chair congratulated the Director and Service for the change in strategy, given the Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee were frustrated and not listened to by the Cabinet, after stating the PRU savings were undeliverable at the last budget and not in the interest of Powys learners. There has been 6 months where Councillors have been unable to respond to the public's questions on this matter, heightening anxiety of which PRU was to close, that was both unfortunate and unacceptable.</p> | |
| <p>Committee sought clarity on the £235k</p> | <p>In the Q1 Finance Report a virement</p> |

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| <p>saving that had been projected by September 2024.</p> | <p>was identified of £120k to mitigate against the budget savings for 2024/25. Currently £233k has not been found on a permanent basis. The service are working hard to mitigate the overall financial position with outstanding savings that need to be found. The undelivered savings would need to be reviewed as part of the Finance Resource Model (FRM). For future years savings, there was £189k set out in the Cabinet resource element leaving £50- 58k in the Year 3 element of the impact assessment and this would need to be considered when planning for the 2025/26 budget.</p> |
| <p>Concern raised of the expectations within this paper, there should have been indicative budgets aligned against the aspirations with clear delivery timelines.</p> | |
| <p>Support around the family has not previously been forthcoming, it would be hoped that the improvements within this document would be implemented.</p> | |
| <p>The Impact Assessment which accompanied this document only had one risk identified, the climate and economy section had not been completed. It was suggested the Service and Cabinet need to review and provide a more in-depth risk assessment following this committee meeting.</p> | |
| <p>The current provision was sited in rented accommodation, where monies had been spent in the last 10years on renovations, why therefore would further capital resource be required.</p> | <p>We recognised that both PRU facilities were in rented accommodation, where significant capital and revenue had been spent on both sites. The costs of rent could increase, and the Council may wish to make better use of council assets should they become available.</p> |
| | <p>Assurance given to the Committee on the well-being of all school staff was a priority and building relationships with partners in schools and looking at how we communicate with clarity so that school leaders and staff understand the direction of travel of the Education Service was paramount to drive school improvement across the LA, ensuring the crucial balance between challenge and support was</p> |

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| | right. We were working on a national level as well as newly seconded head teachers developing a peer support network. |
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5. SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Joint Committee discussed and confirmed observations and recommendations to Cabinet.

- The Committee welcomed:
 - o The vision and the information held within the document presented.

- The Committee requested:
 - o Assurance that Early Years through to Post 16 was clearly linked to the overarching Transformation Plan whilst keeping the most vulnerable of our learners at its core.
 - o Further information from Children's Services in respect of the numbers of learners with Additional Learning Needs that were in receipt of services and where within the Education system those children were e.g. mainstream, special schools, PRU (Pupil Referral Units).
 - o The LA investigate the possibility of an Invest to Save opportunity within PRU Education.
 - o They receive at the earliest opportunity clarity on the number of Hubs.
 - o Contingencies and potential risks within the Inclusion Strategic Plan need to be expanded upon, particularly in respect of Workstream 3.
 - o Further Information on the long-term investment requirements.

- The Committee remained unconvinced about
 - o How closely the Inclusion Strategic Plan was linked to the Transformation Programme.
 - o The indicative timelines set out within the documents in regard to the PRU's.
 - o The progression measures for those learners with ALN, who are more able and talented, to ensure they continue on their learning trajectories needs to be more explicit within this strategic plan.
 - o The financing of the aspirations held within the Inclusion Strategic Plan. There should have been indicative budgets set alongside the aspirations with clear timelines, stating initial investment costs and clear narrative of expected outcomes and savings.

- The Committee expressed concern:
 - o That Post 16 learning was falling behind both the Inclusion Strategic Plan and the Transformation Programme.
 - o That Early Years Education and Transition to the next setting was not clearly defined within the document provided to Scrutiny, with special consideration for those learners with Additional Learning Needs.
 - o That there was no structured provision for Parents and families of learners with Additional Learning Needs evident within the documents provided.

o That relevant stakeholders, Schools and partner agencies, do not appear to have been consulted in a meaningful way on the Inclusion Strategic Plan.

Recommendations:

1. The Committee requests clarification on the number of Hubs.
2. The Committee requests that indicative timelines are clearly set out within the Inclusion Strategic Plan and the Transformation Programme.
3. The crossover of ALN and more able and talented learners under Workstream 1, needs to be more explicit in the report, especially as raised previously by Estyn.
4. Early Intervention and transition processes within the Strategic Plan need to be clearly documented and clarified.
5. Evidence to be provided that stakeholders, including Schools and partner agencies have been, or will be consulted in a meaningful way on the Inclusion Strategic Plan.
6. There needs to be a clear delivery plan, including indicative budgets and timelines aligned throughout the Inclusion Strategic Plan.
7. Confirmation that the Transformation Programme will not be delayed as there is a clear linkage to the development of the Inclusion Strategic Plan.
8. Contingencies and potential risks need to be expanded upon, particularly in relation to partner agencies involvement.
9. Concern raised that a review of Post 16 Education continues to fall behind.
10. Request that regular updates be provided to relevant scrutiny committees.

County Councillor R G Thomas (Chair)