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Learning, Skills and Economy Scrutiny Committee Monday, 25 June 2018

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LEARNING, SKILLS AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS, POWYS ON MONDAY, 25 JUNE 2018

PRESENT

County Councillors: M Barnes, G Breeze, K W Curry, B Davies, D O Evans, D R Jones, E M Jones, G Jones, D Jones-Poston, K Laurie-Parry, I McIntosh, S McNicholas, L Roberts, P Roberts, D Selby, R G Thomas,
Parent Governor Representatives: Mrs A Davies and Mrs S. Davies
Mrs M Evitts, Mr J Brautigam, JG Morris,

In attendance

County Councillors Myfanwy Alexander (Portfolio Holder for Education) and Aled Davies (Portfolio Holder for Finance)

Ian Budd (Director of Education), Joanna Cassey (Interim Head of Learning), Marianne Evans (Senior Manager Schools Transformation), Betsan Ifan (Schools Transformation Programme Manager), Jim Swabey (Heart of Wales Property Services), Nick Hinckley (Heart of Wales Property Services)

1.	ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE MEETING
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RESOLVED that County Councillor P Roberts be elected as Chair for the meeting.

2.	APOLOGIES
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Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors Sandra Davies, Les George, Edwin Roderick and Parent Governor Representative Nigel Bufton.

3.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
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No declarations of interest were received.

4.	DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIPS
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There were no 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.

5.	SCENE SETTING
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This item was deferred.

6.	21ST CENTURY SCHOOL PROGRAMME - WELSHPOOL PRIMARY PROJECT AND YSGOL CALON CYMRU
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This item had been referred to scrutiny at a Cabinet meeting on the 19th June 2018 where the following decision was taken:

RESOLVED that, subject to the views	Reason for Decision:
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of Scrutiny	
Cabinet approves an increase in the budget for Welshpool Schools Project to £16,794,385 to be split between Band A and Band B.	To enable the two schools to be built in Welshpool therefore improving the learning environment for pupils.
Cabinet approves that any unallocated funding in Band A is invested in improvements at Ysgol Calon Cymru.	To improve facilities for pupils in a major Schools Transformation project.

Documents considered:

- Cabinet Report 19th June 2018
- Scrutiny Briefing
- Report to Learning, Skills and Economy Scrutiny Committee

Discussion:

Background

- Schools Transformation in Welshpool started in 2014 looking to transform three infant schools and one junior school (all of poor quality) to two primary schools (one Welsh medium, one English medium)
- Welshpool is an area with significant demographic issues
- The new schools opened in September 2017 using existing buildings (English medium on three sites and Welsh medium on one site)
- Approval is in place under Band A of 21st Century School funding to build a new English Medium School at Salop Road and a new Welsh Medium School on the Ysgol Maesydre site
- In spring 2017 Dawnus was appointed as contractor to the two buildings
- In March 2018 CADW confirmed that Ysgol Maesydre was to be Listed
- The service looked at alternative locations for the Welsh Medium School but no town centre sites in public or private ownership were available
- Consideration was given to co-locating the Welsh Medium and English Medium schools on the same site but this was rejected as the site was too constricted
- Therefore the service worked with contractor to incorporate the Listed Building into the Welsh Medium School
- This has resulted in increased costs and the consequent report to Cabinet which proposes to split the project with the English Medium School continuing under Band A of 21st Century Schools, the Welsh Medium School moving to Band B. It is intended to spend the money now available within Band A to improve the Llandrindod Wells campus of Ysgol Calon Cymru a merged school opening in September 2018.

Reasons for increased costs at Welshpool 21st Century Schools project

- These were given as:
 - Re-design costs and costs associated with remodelling a listed building;
 - Economies of scale no longer achievable due to schools now being built sequentially rather than concurrently

- Further investigation in to the Welshpool CiW Primary School site identified that the topsoil needs to be removed and re-filled due to a historical use of the land.

Listing

- Not identified as at risk from Listing until the letter from CADW was received in December 2017
- Confirmation of Listing was received from CADW in March 2018
- The Schools Service were unsuccessful in opposing the listing of Ysgol Maesydre although were successful in achieving the exclusion of the more recent additions to the property to the Listing
- Ysgol Maesydre had not been maintained during the recent past and is in a poor state of repair. Whether or not it is used as part of the Welsh medium school there is a duty on the Council to repair and maintain Listed Buildings
- It was confirmed that it was not possible to demolish a Listed Building and that a specialist had been commissioned to advise what could be done with this property
- It was confirmed that there was limited opportunity to receive grant funding from CADW and this should not be relied upon
- The Schools Service have been in close correspondence with Welsh Government regarding the increased costs and Welsh Government are content with the approach proposed. The inclusion of this within the 21st Century Schools programme means the additional costs are shared
- It was acknowledged the applicant for Listed Building status had been in correspondence with the Schools Service during the earlier consultation process but the schools service were of the view that there was not wide spread community support for the views expressed in his submission
- During ongoing discussions with people of Welshpool it was not identified as an important building that might be proposed for listing
- The contract managers confirmed that the costs for the Welsh Medium school are estimates based on similar schemes elsewhere
- The service are looking to design the school with the main teaching and learning areas in the new build with the administration and early years in the Listed Building
- Contract managers are working closely with CADW on preplanning matters to get the best outcome. CADW are keen for the site to be redeveloped with the right scheme. They would object to a new school sited in front of the Listed Building for visual amenity reasons and in any event there would still be a duty for the authority to maintain the Listed Building

The meeting adjourned for the Chair and Audit representatives to consider commercially sensitive information regarding project costs.

- It was not clear how much of the additional spend is due to the Listing of Ysgol Maesydre

Church in Wales site

- Increased costs came to light when ground investigation revealed demolition debris on site

Reasons Ysgol Calon Cymru prioritised for the newly available capital funding from Band A

- The condition of the Llandrindod campus was identified in 2016 as category C. This has recently been reassessed as Band C/D. A key criteria for the Welsh Governments 21st Century Schools Programme is to reduce the number of Condition D schools. This needs to be addressed as quickly as possible

Associated matters

- Scrutiny and Audit Members were concerned that there has been insufficient time afforded for proper scrutiny of this matter
- One of the reasons given to support the 21st Century Schools Welshpool project was there was excess surplus places between the four schools (434 available places 82 unfilled (19%)). It is intended to provide 510 places between the two new schools with 352 pupils expected (158 unfilled places (30.6%)) which was higher than the original excess capacity. It was explained that there were approximately 100 pupils from the Welshpool catchment area that were accessing education outside of the catchment therefore this indicates there are a greater number of pupils in Welshpool than currently attend schools in Welshpool. The potential impact of pupil movements on surrounding schools was not explored.
- Cost for the new schools per pupil were calculated as: Welshpool CiW School £28k/pupil if full, £37k/pupil at present occupancy, and Ysgol Gymraeg y Trallwng £41k/pupil if full and £77k/pupil at present occupancy
- Spare capacity is normally built into new schools and in the procurement process tenders need to show how they will develop plans to extend school buildings to accommodate for increasing numbers. New build schools across Wales are known to attract pupils. There is also a significant Welsh Government strategy to increase the number of Welsh speakers in Wales and therefore the Welsh school is being built for 150 places to accommodate future growth. The Local Development Plan identifies land for new properties which will result in additional pupils (estimated at 1 child per 5 houses). The projections calculate these schools to be of the correct size.
- Concern that projects are tendered for on perfect site scenario and further information requested on this process.

7.	EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT PLAN
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This item was deferred.

8.	POST 16 REVIEW
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This item was deferred.

9.	WORK PROGRAMME
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The next meetings will be held on the 19th July 2018 and 22nd August 2018.

County Councillor Pete Roberts