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Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee Thursday, 28 March 2019

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LEARNING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL - COUNTY HALLON THURSDAY, 28 MARCH 2019

PRESENT

County Councillor P Roberts (Chairman)

County Councillors G Breeze, B Davies, S C Davies, D R Jones, E Roderick and L Roberts

Parent Governor Representatives: A Davies, S. Davies and G Robson.

Church Representative: M Evitts

In attendance:

A Clark (Head of Education), E Towns (Senior Challenge Advisor), L Lovell (Senior Challenge Advisor), M Wheeler (ALN Manager) and E Patterson (Scrutiny Officer)

1.	APOLOGIES
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Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors K Laurie-Parry and G Thomas and A Bulman (Director of Social Services).

2	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
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No declarations of interest were received.

3	DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP
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No declarations of party whip were received.

4	MINUTES
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The minutes of the meeting held on the 11th February 2019 were agreed subject to the following amendments:

- Present: G Robson
- P7then this impacts not only on the financial position of the school but also on the teaching workload as *at secondary level* a TLR removes the teaching commitment by one third.
- P10 add the following to the paragraph on feminine hygiene: ‘....Feminine hygiene and toilets grant *and does Powys have a policy on the provision of feminine hygiene facilities in schools?*’ with the response amended to ‘*There is no policy for the provision of feminine hygiene facilities in Powys Schools however, under the scoring system....*’
- P11 add the following to the second outcome: ‘*which would be expected by May 2019....*’

The Chair sought clarity regarding the spend of the feminine hygiene grant at Llangattock. The Portfolio Holder advised that it was her understanding that this money had to be spent on capital projects. Llangattock Primary School was at the top of the list when it came to needing toilet improvements and she understood that this had been spent on the junior girls’ toilets.

The Chair asked for the minutes to be circulated amongst Committee Members after which he would sign the agreed copy for the minute book.

5	BRIEFING ON SECONDARY SCHOOL STANDARDS, ATTENDANCE AND EXCLUSIONS
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Documents:

- Briefing on Secondary School Standards, Admissions and Exclusions (verified)

Discussion:

Standards

There remains a big difference in the performance of girls and boys. What is being done to address this?

This gap has been investigated and it appears that whilst the gap has increased it appears to be specifically cohort related. In particular it shows in relation to results in language and at Capped 9 score. There was a particular issue this year with the English GCSE where a change in grade boundaries meant it was necessary to get an extra 20 points for a Grade C. This change impacted on those schools who had focussed efforts on pupils at the C/D boundary. This impact was felt in two schools in particular.

The Portfolio Holder advised that this had been a controversial change and that some local authorities were challenging this. Impact can also be seen as a result of the books that teachers choose for pupils to study. Some books are less or more popular and this can impact on the results obtained. Schools also are aware that different learning styles can work with different cohorts.

Does the schools service have the data which shows which schools are implementing actions that are successful?

This data is available and the schools have attended a meeting with the school's service to receive a presentation on this data. The schools service know which schools need to do more to prepare for these new examinations. This year there were some unexpected instances where schools with specialist teachers have been hit the hardest with the changes in examinations.

The Portfolio Holder noted that in moving to use the Capped 9 score to compare schools it may be that schools offer one or two practical subjects that appeal to all learners as if there are learners who are struggling to maintain interest the inclusion of a popular subject may stimulate their interest and help raise their attainment across the board.

Is the decline in A level pupils proportionate to the overall decline in pupil numbers in Powys?

The Portfolio Holder was of the view that A level pupils were leaving Powys to access courses at sixth form colleges for a number of reasons such as:

- A subject they wish to follow is not offered in Powys
- They are fed up with being in school
- They are attracted by the bright lights where sixth form colleges are sited

A questionnaire for 16-19 years olds is out for consultation to try to ascertain why students have made their choices for sixth form study. This information will be used to inform the Post 16 review.

It is requested that this survey be extended to allow ex Powys pupils who are attending university to complete the questionnaire.

Looking at the data for sixth form students are schools admitting pupils that previously would not have gained a place due to falling numbers?

Officers have asked this question. It is clear that the numbers of students taking 2+ A levels have declined and the numbers of students taking 3+ A levels have declined significantly.

Where are the results for pupils taking vocational subjects?

Information on the results of vocational courses is held with the colleges. It is important to know what courses the students want to follow across the whole spectrum of academic and vocational courses along with apprenticeships. At present year 11 pupils have 4 options:

- Sixth form in Powys
- Job
- College in Powys or England
- Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)

Part of the decline in sixth form numbers is due to a demographic decline.

Do schools collect data regarding leavers?

This information is gathered by Careers Wales but the authority cannot access it. There are issues with pupils accessing provision across the border but having 1000 pupils accessing sixth form provision across 12 sites is very difficult. The Portfolio Holder advised that appropriate careers advice should be available including regarding what steps could be taken beyond A level for students who come from families who have no experience of education beyond A levels.

A lot of money is put into the careers event but what ongoing advice is available?

This would be a whole area for another session but support for this event is provided by the Seren Network.

Appendix A shows a large variation in the added points score between schools with a range of over 200 points. Is this range usual and is it the same schools that perform better? Is there some form of added value information which could be provided to help identify which schools are particularly successful?

There are a number of problems when comparing results at KS5. It is not possible to compare year on year as the pupils that attend sixth form are only part of a cohort the rest of which will go to college, apprenticeships or seek employment. The proportion of these activities will change with each cohort. It is therefore difficult to know what attainment a school should be expected to make with their part cohort that stays on. Some schools that have lower added points score actually have results that show good added value and are higher than expected. In comparison some schools with higher added points score are only doing as well as should be expected. It is both difficult to compare between schools and within school year on year.

Scrutiny request that information regarding added value is included in the information presented next year. (It is noted that added value is unverified as it is not collected by Welsh Government).

The information regarding Key Stage 5 results (average wider points score) shows Powys as ranking at 10th across Wales. It is understood that Powys is one of the best investors in education and should be one of the highest performers in Wales. Why are these results not better? Is the authority receiving value for money for this service and are the Portfolio Holder and service concerned regarding this position?

The Portfolio Holder observed that it will be necessary to ascertain why the decline has occurred. Is it because of teaching and learning or because pupils are studying fewer A levels. She does see a correlation between a decline in the average points score and the increased percentage of pupils taking less than 2 A levels.

What is the service doing to ensure that schools are not taking on sixth form pupils for whom this is not the most appropriate provision?

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that these figures are the engine for change rather than being used to mask change.

The Head of Education confirmed that all but a very small number of Powys sixth forms struggle to provide high quality provision across all specialities. This position also applies at KS3 and KS4. Changing structures should provide the opportunity to get the best teachers in front of students. It will be possible to use e-learning for some but not all subjects. There is a quality issue and experienced school leaders would be concerned. It is necessary for Powys to offer excellent A level and vocational subjects for Powys students but it is not possible that this can be provided across 12 sites.

Is a delegation of 74.8% well spent?

The delegated budget does not support sixth form provision.

The additional information would be provided for circulation to Members.

Exclusions

Can more detail be provided regarding the breakdown of exclusions between primary and secondary schools?

This information will be circulated after the meeting.

The Portfolio Holder advised that the vast majority of exclusions were for 5 days or less and are used by schools in a number of cases for pupils to reflect on their behaviour and avoid an escalation.

Are figures available for managed moves?

This information is available where the moves have been managed by the schools' service. Where moves are made as a result of parental choice this information won't necessarily be recorded.

The Portfolio Holder noted that some schools manage behaviour far better than others and these schools tend to have pastoral experts on their staff.

Do schools share best practice for example where restorative justice is working effectively?

Best practice is shared and should be shared more widely. There has been a tendency in Powys to buy in expertise even when there is expertise held locally. This should also be possible across the ERW region and schools should be encouraged to trade services and be comfortable with both buying and selling services amongst themselves.

Another successful method is to have Heads of Learning covering two years instead of one which will release capacity for pastoral leads to be appointed.

Is there a change in the behaviour that pupils are exhibiting which is leading to exclusions? Do some schools have bigger problems than others?

The support available to schools is universal but some schools do not know that this is available. From September a panel will be convened including officers from education, youth and social services to ensure that the right support is available.

Are there changes in the behavioural problems that are being exhibited?

It is perhaps rather that society is getting better at understanding and identifying the problems rather than that there has been an increase in problems. It is known that approximately 25% of troubled children have suffered a bereavement and that undiagnosed SEN can show in behavioural problems.

Have exclusions resulting from discriminatory behaviour increased and how does Powys compare to other Welsh authorities?

Schools have to inform the authority of incidents of racism. There has not been an increase in the incidence exclusions due to racism or sexual behaviour. It is difficult to compare with other local authorities as comparative data ceased to be published since 2013.

Outcome:

- **That the additional information regarding exclusions be circulated**
- **That when standards are next considered added value is included in the data provided**
- **That consideration is given to extending the age range for the Post 16 questionnaire**

6	CHAIR'S BRIEFING
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The Chair asked Cllr David Jones to brief on the recent ERW Joint Committee meeting.

This meeting had been held on the 25th March 2019 hosted by Swansea City Council. Press reports had been published identifying the concerns raised by Neath Port Talbot Council and a report which was due to be taken at their Cabinet giving notice to withdraw from the Joint consortium from April 2020. A report was received from the Managing Director which explained that Neath Port Talbot were yet to pay their contribution for the period 2018-19 and it appeared that they intended to give notice that they would no longer be part of the consortium from April 2020. It was understood that the Leader and other ERW Leaders had met with the Minister regarding ERW on the 25th March 2019 but the outcome of that meeting was unknown.

The Portfolio Holder observed that there were concerns amongst members of the consortium that ERW provided value for money.

It was confirmed that despite the uncertainties Powys staff remained committed to regional working.

Cllr Jones further advised that the Joint Scrutiny Chairs meeting had discussed the potential to undertake pre-Joint Committee scrutiny to provide an enhanced level of scrutiny at this regional level.

7	WORK PROGRAMME
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It was confirmed that pre-Cabinet scrutiny of the Post 16 Review would take place and the Portfolio Holder advised that this is expected to be available after Easter.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the Co-ordinating Committee had asked for bids for working groups on Early Years and WESP/Immersion to be submitted. The bid form would be circulated for Members to complete and return.

Other items to be considered for inclusion on the work programme include:

- School Transformation Policy
- Funding Formula Review
- School Transport

County Councillor P Roberts (Chairman)