

Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee

8th July 2019

Scrutiny briefing on:

- **School Major Improvements**

School Major Improvements was looked at by the Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee on 11th February 2019. Scrutiny observations were provided and it was expected that this would be considered at Cabinet on 5th March 2019 however, the minutes of this meeting note that 'his report was deferred pending consideration of the budget by Council.'

This further report outlines developments since spring and is provided to Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee to enable pre-Cabinet scrutiny to be undertaken.

A copy of the observations provided in relation to the report considered in February 2019 are attached at Appendix A.



Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny Observations to Cabinet on the Schools Major Improvements Programme 2019 - 2020

The Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee met on 11th February 2019 and considered the following documents:

- Schools Service Major Improvements Programme 2019 - 2020

The Learning, Skills and Economy Scrutiny Committee thank the Portfolio Holders for Education and Finance, the Head of Schools Services and the Schools Capital and Property Manager for attending scrutiny.

Observations:

Scrutiny welcome the opportunity to undertake pre-Cabinet scrutiny of the Schools Major Improvements Programme and note the allocation of £2million for capital improvements for the year 2019/20.

It is noted that the programme covers a range of improvements, refurbishments, DDA, Early Years and upgrading works. It was also noted that the programme may be amended to take into account in year urgent health and safety works that are needed. The links with the 21st Century Schools programme was explored and it was confirmed that schools who are due to receive feasibility studies under the 21st Century Schools programme would not be included for improvements under the School Improvement Programme.

Concern was expressed regarding the intention to reduce the funding in the Major Improvements programme in future years. It is acknowledged that the 21st Century Schools programme will result in the replacement of those schools in the worst condition with an overall improvement in the school estate.

A capital programme needs to invest sufficient funds to ensure that schools are appropriately maintained and do not deteriorate to the extent that significant investment is required. Research is suggested to ascertain what an appropriate level of investment would be to ensure good maintenance of the school's estate. This can then be assessed against what the authority can afford in this regard. Aligned to this is a question of how many school sites the authority can afford to support. At present there are 84 primary school sites, 13 high school sites and 3 special school sites*. Proposals are progressing to close one of two primary schools (Ysgol Banw or Ysgol Llanerfyl) and close four primary schools in Welshpool and open two new primary schools. This would reduce the number of primary school sites to 81. The Portfolio Holder also indicated an intention to modernise primary provision in the Newtown area with the potential to reduce five primary school sites to two.

A previous recommendation from scrutiny on Fair Funding stated:

That Cabinet demonstrate that small schools are not receiving a disproportionate amount of funding to the detriment of medium and large schools

and this recommendation also applies to the distribution of the additional capital funds for distribution across the school estate.

It is noted that works undertaken for DDA requirements fall under this programme and the works undertaken have the benefit not only of allowing a young person to access education in their local community but that the alterations made remain and the school can continue to offer a higher level of accessibility. The planned reduction of capital funding for Schools Major Improvements may put at risk the ability of the authority to respond to DDA requirements or provide sufficient funds for repairs and maintenance. It is essential that neither of these areas of funding should be put at risk and scrutiny may wish to review this in their end of year report.

Scrutiny noted that a capital grant for feminine hygiene and toilet facilities of £32,226 had been allocated to one school. It was confirmed that only one scheme relating to toilets had fallen within the programme under the scoring system and therefore the funds had been allocated to this scheme. Scrutiny query how it is intended to ensure all schools have access to 'improved toilet facilities and feminine hygiene hardware in schools'.

Scrutiny noted that the restriction those schools who had subscribed to the Property Plus scheme run by HoWPS had experienced a full year of 'emergency only' service. This had limited their ability to undertake regular maintenance and scrutiny seek assurance that the maintenance backlog which had built up during this period has been addressed and is not contributing to larger problems in the future.

Scrutiny are concerned that this issue first highlighted in a scrutiny report relating to the performance review of the first year of the operation of HoWPS if repeated on a regular basis may lead to a reduction in the life expectancy of the school estate.

Scrutiny welcome the work that is being undertaken to assess the requirements for bringing all schools up to standard as part of the Schools Asset Management Plan. Scrutiny recognise that until this work is completed it is not possible to quantify the financial risk to the authority inherent with bringing the schools up to date of a position of full maintenance. We look forward to sight of this information in line with the recommendations that were made when this plan was scrutinised.

Recommendations:

Scrutiny's Recommendation	Accept (plus Action and timescale)	Partially Accept (plus Rationale and Action and timescale)	Reject (plus Rationale)
1. That a review of the level of expenditure in the capital programme and how it relates to the viability of schools is undertaken to ensure that scarce funding is not wasted			
2. That scrutiny monitor the ratio of DDA capital expenditure as a proportion of the capital budget and advise of any risk this expenditure may have on the wider capital programme			
3. That the service work with HoWPS to ensure that an appropriate level of routine maintenance and repairs are undertaken at all times.			
4. That scrutiny are provided with the completed Schools Asset Management Plan to include the financial costs of bringing each school including its grounds up to a position of full maintenance			

In accordance with Rule 7.27.2 the Cabinet is asked to provide a written response to the scrutiny report, including an action plan as soon as possible, but at the latest, within 2 months of the date of the meeting i.e. by 06.05.19.

Membership of the Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee present on 11th February 2019:

County Councillors: P Roberts (Chair), G Breeze, B Davies, S C Davies, K Laurie-Parry, L Roberts, E Roderick and G Thomas

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

Church Representative: M Evitts

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