

Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee

8th July 2019

Scrutiny briefing on:

- **Post 16 Review**

The last time that Scrutiny commented on the Post 16 review was at the stage that the Schools Organisation Policy had been subject to pre-Cabinet scrutiny and Observations were provided to Cabinet. This was undertaken at Scrutiny Committee B held on the 26th January 2018 and the observations were provided to Cabinet at their meeting on 13th March 2018. A copy of these observations are attached at Appendix 1.

The Schools Organisation Policy covered all phases of education but scrutiny made the following comments specifically with regard to Post 16.

2. Post 16 provision:

The proposals within the Delivery Plan are noted. This needs to proceed at pace as noted by the WAO report. Scrutiny understand that the number of pupils accessing Post 16 provision has dropped by approximately 100 over the last 5 years. These pupils are choosing to access quality provision outside of Powys and the Schools Policy gives an opportunity to refresh what is on offer to pupils within Powys. It is disappointing that it is only intended to implement a new model from September 2019 which the 2018 cohort will not be able to access. The decline in pupils accessing Post 16 in Powys has been known for some years and assurance is sought that this is addressed at pace and without delay.

The WAO report to which these comments refer is contained within the WAO Annual Improvement Report 2016/17 and in particular a Review of Education Finance published in June 2017:

Issue date	Brief description	Conclusions	Proposals for improvement
June 2017	<p>Review of Education Finance</p> <p>Our review set out to answer the question, 'Is the availability and quality of advice adequate to support the Council and its schools in managing education budgets'?</p>	<p>We concluded that schools and councillors receive improved advice and support about the management of schools' budgets, but the Council faces challenges in achieving the pace to deliver an affordable, sustainable education service. We reached this conclusion because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the monitoring of schools' delegated budgets, and the support and challenge provided to schools when setting their budgets, are improving in most respects; but • the Council faces major challenges in achieving the pace that will deliver an affordable and sustainable education service and halt the projected substantial decline in schools' financial health. 	<p>P1 In order to provide the necessary challenge to secondary schools with regard to their financial planning, the Council should ensure that it has the capacity to analyse and evaluate schools' curricular planning.</p> <p>P2 The Council should work with schools to explore means of improving the efficiency and effectiveness with which schools procure goods and services.</p> <p>P3 In order to further embed resource management as a key component of school improvement, the Council should agree with schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a consistent template for recording key financial information within school development plans; and • a system whereby schools' financial health might be assessed and reported annually. <p>P4 In order to improve its clarity and transparency, the Council should review its Service Level Agreement with schools for Financial Services, ensuring that the optional element includes only those services that are not statutory functions of the Council.</p> <p>P5 In order to ensure a common understanding of financial data, the Council should ensure that data reported to members is consistent with that reported to the Welsh Government, and that any necessary</p>

			<p>variance between the two sets is fully explained.</p> <p>P6 In order to achieve an affordable and adequately resourced school system, the Council should increase the pace and scale of change in implementing its Schools Organisation Policy, Planning Education Provision. In particular, the Council should work with partners inside and outside Wales to ensure that learners aged 16 to 19 are able to access a suitable curriculum in the language of their choice</p>
--	--	--	---

Proposal for improvement P6 refers particularly to Post 16 education.

Cabinet minutes relating to this item from 13th March 2018 are as follows:

1.	SCHOOLS POLICY - PLANS FOR POWYS SCHOOLS AND FORWARD TRANSFORMATION WORK PROGRAMME
-----------	---

County Councillor James Evans left the meeting whilst this item was being considered having declared a prejudicial interest.

Cabinet considered feedback received during the recent consultation on the Plans for Powys Schools Policy, and an updated version, renamed the 'School Organisation Policy', and an associated Delivery Plan which outlined the Council's priorities for the period 2018-2021. The new policy would replace the current Schools Organisation Policy 2015, and would become effective from the 1st April 2018.

County Councillor David Jones presented the report of the Scrutiny Group which had looked at the policy and highlighted three areas of concern: issues raised by Wales Audit Office on need to increase the pace and scale of change, post 16 provision and the reducing number of pupils and courses in the face of competition from cross border sixth form colleges, and issues of governance and a lack of clarity of where decisions would be taken.

The Portfolio Holder for Education explained that the need to increase the pace of change was one of the main reasons for the revised School Organisation Policy. She acknowledged the competition from sixth form colleges noting that it showed that

pupils were prepared to travel to access courses. Pastoral care and access to the Welsh bacallaureate compensated for some of the social pressures to go to sixth form colleges in larger towns. It was confirmed that all decisions would be taken by the Cabinet.

Members noted that not every pupil wanted to go on to take A Levels and that there had to be a range of options open to them as shown by the recent very successful careers fair. Members also discussed the review of ALN currently being undertaken and the configuration of special schools in the county noting the preference of many parents for their children to be educated close to their communities.

RESOLVED	Reason for Decision:
1. To approve the post-consultation version of the School Organisation Policy.	To enable the Council to move towards a more efficient network of schools
2. To approve the Delivery Plan for 2018-20.	

County Councillor James Evans returned to the meeting.

The Delivery Plan referred to in the Cabinet minutes of 13th March 2019 included the following timeframe for the Post 16 section of the Organisation Policy:

Programme 1 – Secondary & Post-16 Provision

Ref.	Project	Links to priorities within the School Organisation Policy	What will the project deliver?	Start date	Estimated Delivery Date
1.1	Implement the outcome of phase 1 of the secondary school review – North Powys	<i>New Welsh-medium provision to be established</i>	Recommendation on location for new provision and delivery plan	January 2018	December 2018
			Implementation period	January 2019	March 2023
1.2	Complete phase 2 of secondary school review – North Powys	<i>Secondary schools to become ‘all through schools’ or part of multi-</i>	Recommendations for secondary education in North Powys and	April 2018	September 2018

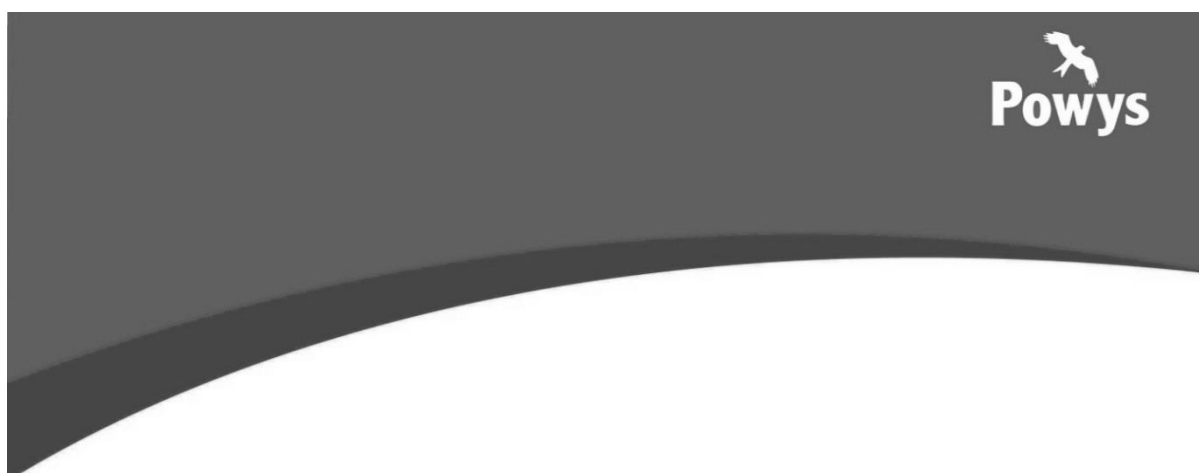
		<i>sited arrangements</i> <i>Improvements to the Powys schools estate, either as part of the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools Programme or as part of the Council's Asset Management Programme</i>	implementation plan agreed		
1.3	Develop new county-wide sixth form delivery model	<i>A new model for delivering post-16 provision to be implemented</i>	Recommendations for a new partnership model	In progress	July 2018
			Pilot new partnerships, including digital learning and improvements to the ICT infrastructure	September 2018	September 2019
			Full roll out new partnerships	September 2019	
			Explore feasibility of capital investment for future delivery model	Post-2021	TBA

It was then intended to have a report on Post 16 education to the Learning, Skills and Economy Scrutiny Committee on 25th June 2019 however this item was deferred and has not come back into the formal governance cycle until now.

The purpose of this scrutiny session is to undertake pre-Cabinet scrutiny of the report 'Review of Sixth Form Provision 2019'.

The Post 16 papers to Cabinet include:

- Cabinet report
- Appendix 1 – Review of Sixth Form provision in Powys June 2019
- Appendix A – Report on post 16 Destinations survey



Scrutiny observations on Schools Policy

Scrutiny Committee B considered the draft Schools Policy at their meeting on the 26th January 2018. Their observations by way of an extract from the minutes of that meeting are attached at Appendix A.

The Scrutiny Group welcome the production of the Schools Policy which provides welcome clarity from the Cabinet regarding their approach in conjunction with Vision 2025. The Schools Policy has been amended in light of the consultation process and some of the observations made by scrutiny have been addressed. However, some concerns remain and scrutiny seek assurance from Cabinet that they are content the Policy is sufficiently clear to address these issue:

1 Regulatory concerns:

At Audit Committee on 20th February 2018 the Annual Audit Letter 2016-17 (dated 25th January 2018 was received which included reference to the use of resources:

reported the need for the Council to increase the pace and scale of change in implementing its 'Schools Organisation Policy, Planning Education Provision', in order to achieve an affordable and sustainable education service.

This came from the Annual Improvement Report 2016-17 which included reference to the Review of Education and Finance June 2017 where the following recommendation was made:

In order to achieve an affordable and adequately resourced school system, the Council should increase the pace and scale of change in implementing its Schools Organisation Policy, Planning Education Provision. In particular, the Council should work with partners inside and outside Wales to ensure that learners aged 16 to 19 are able to access a suitable curriculum in the language of their choice.

Scrutiny seek assurance that Cabinet have been mindful of these Auditor recommendations when preparing the policy.

2. Post 16 provision:

The proposals within the Delivery Plan are noted. This needs to proceed at pace as noted by the WAO report. Scrutiny understand that the number of pupils accessing Post 16 provision has dropped by approximately 100 over the last 5 years. These pupils are choosing to access quality provision outside of Powys and the Schools Policy gives an opportunity to refresh what is on offer to pupils within Powys. It is disappointing that it is only intended to implement a new model from September 2019 which the 2018 cohort will not be able to access. The decline in pupils accessing Post 16 in Powys has been known for some years and assurance is sought that this is addressed at pace and without delay.

3. Governance

The governance of this programme remains unclear. A Delivery Plan has been put together for agreement at Cabinet with monitoring at a Steering Group who may consider and include other potential projects. Clarity around the Steering Group is lacking within the report and further detail is sought regarding the public oversight and accountability of decisions regarding School Organisation.

Extract from minutes of Scrutiny Committee B 26th January 2018

The Schools Manager Schools Transformation introduced the Draft Schools Policy which is out for consultation (copy filed with signed minutes).

The Portfolio Holder and Director of Education provided additional detail in response to questions and it is the view of scrutiny that it should not be necessary to question the Portfolio Holder and Director of Education to gain an understanding of the Policy. The Policy should contain sufficient detail to be standalone.

The following observations are made:

- The Policy outlines high level aspirations and is short on the level of detail which would be expected in such a policy as to how these will be achieved. It needs to be motivational.
- There is particular lack of detail regarding the financial sustainability of schools and reference needs to be made to the Formula Funding review
- In respect of alternative models of delivery these will need to be based on sound educational principles and research and consideration should be given to referencing this in Section 3 paragraph 4 of the Policy
- Section 5 rightly includes leadership as a key consideration with appropriate aspirations. Consideration should be given to including a similar section on teaching and aspirations relating thereto
- Post 16 provision needs additional detail regarding the current work which is being undertaken with providers. The document acknowledges that schools are challenged by increased competition from out of county providers and notes that joint working will be undertaken to provide a curriculum that meets the needs of learners. This will have to be considerably more attractive than at present. Learners are demonstrating that they are prepared to travel considerable distances and spend a considerable amount of time to access excellent provision on single sites, something the collaborative curriculum within Powys has demonstrably not been able to compete with. There is an urgent need to progress this part of the Policy.
- There is a lack of reference to the role of Governors in supporting the aims of the authority expressed within this policy. Governors will need training and support to fulfil their role.
- There is a lack of reference to early years which are intimately linked to school provision and should be referenced
- The opportunities offered by e-learning should be included with an acknowledgment of what can be delivered using the current infrastructure and what would be needed to fully access the opportunities offered by this technology
- With regard to Governance if the Learning and Skills Programme Board are monitoring progress on the Work Programme they should also be involved in the setting of the Work Programme