

Public Document Pack

Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee Wednesday, 22 January 2020

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LEARNING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL ON WEDNESDAY, 22 JANUARY 2020

PRESENT

County Councillor P Roberts (Chair)
County Councillors B Davies, S Davies, D Jones (for latter part of the meeting)
and L Roberts
Parent Governor Representatives A Davies, S Davies and G Robson
Church Representative M Evitts

In attendance:

County Councillor A Davies (Portfolio Holder for Finance)
L Lovell (Interim Head of Education), E Palmer (Head of Transformation and
Communications) and M Evans (Senior Manager Education Services)

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| 1. | APOLOGIES |
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Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor K Laurie-Parry and
County Councillor P Davies (Portfolio Holder for Education)

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| 2. | DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST |
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No declaration of interests were received.

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| 3. | DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP |
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No declaration of party whips were received.

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| 4. | STRATEGIC REVIEW OF SCHOOLS |
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The Head of Transformation and Communications explained that originally it had been planned that this paper would be put before Cabinet, be considered at scrutiny and go back to Cabinet for approval. However, it had been decided that as scrutiny had previously had involvement in this item that Cabinet would approve the paper on the 21st January allowing an opportunity to start engagement without waiting for a further Cabinet meeting to approve the paper. Scrutiny would today have the opportunity to make comments to the Officers and Portfolio Holders regarding the engagement and a further session would be arranged for scrutiny to consider the proposals before the Cabinet meeting in April.

When proposals were being considered for Post 16 education the process was delayed to wait for pupil engagement to take place. The outcome of this Learner Survey was deemed to demonstrate a number of interesting viewpoints but that no clear conclusions could be drawn. Can assurance be given that the engagement will be meaningful and of use?

The questions that will be posed are included in the papers and will be worded appropriately for different audiences and will be refined to reduce the number

and avoid repetition. It is acknowledged that the questions last time were too generic.

Opportunities will be given to respond with 'agree', 'disagree', 'don't know' together with an opportunity to write free text.

There is a perception that the authority are given views during engagement but these views are not listened to.

The Interim Head of Education noted that pupil voice is key and she had spoken to pupils who had left Powys to continue their post 16 education elsewhere. A film had been produced of their views which was powerful.

How can a good cross section of responses be assured?

The questionnaire will be sent to all schools and school councils. Schools will promote the questionnaire and facilitate a response from school councils. The engagement will be online and promoted on all forms of social media.

Will an opportunity be taken to use the e-sgol technology to undertake an engagement session with all High School school councils?

It has not been planned to use this method of engagement but this possibility can be explored. It is intended to undertake this round of engagement by online methods. Prior to Christmas a large amount of face to face engagement was undertaken by Officers over a short period although this was limited by purdah whereby engagement with pupils could not take place. By undertaking engagement online it will allow the capacity for Officers to progress this piece of work.

As this phase is engagement rather than consultation where will the engagement details be sited on the website?

These will be sited on the School Transformation page of the website. It will be promoted on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

Recommended that

- **a signpost is placed on the Powys County Council consultation page of the website directing people looking for Schools Transformation engagement to the Schools Transformation page on the website.**
- **as many different forms of engagement as possible are tried and the responses are tracked to see what works best for when consultation starts.**
- **Community groups interested in education are directly advised of the opportunity to contribute to the engagement including but not limited to:**
 - **Level the Playing Field**
 - **Powys Education Reform Movement**
 - **Rhag**

Who is the target audience?

Everyone with an interest in education in Powys including teacher, parents and pupils who live out of county but attend or work in Powys schools. This includes the public, staff, unions and pupils.

This list omits business, youth groups such as YFC and post 16 providers out of county.

There is a separate recommendation in the Cabinet report 'to approve officers engaging in discussions with neighbouring authorities and key partners as part of the development of a new vision for education in Powys'.

The service are working with partners such as the Powys Teaching Health Board for publicity in hospitals and GP surgeries for an opportunity to highlight this to parents of pre-school children.

Will the engagement documentation be assessed as appropriate for comprehension to the different target audiences?

This document attached to this agenda has been sent for assessment by plainenglish.com and when this has been completed it will have a Crystal Mark.

Has the service prepared a single page briefing for Members of the authority who are not as informed as scrutiny Members on the issues surrounding schools transformation?

This will be prepared for Members in conjunction with the engagement on schools transformation.

It is understood that it is intended to invite Head Teachers of schools which have previously experienced transformation to speak at the next Schools Conference. Can it be confirmed that this will include a Head Teacher of a Welsh Medium School?

This opportunity will be investigated.

What are the proposals to develop Welsh Medium education in Powys?

This stage is for engagement and it will be the next stage, which scrutiny will have an opportunity to examine, where more detailed proposals will be put forward. The widest engagement is sought so that all views are available when decisions are taken.

Welsh Government have given the authority a target of increasing pupils being assessed through the medium of Welsh by 10-14% which equates to 150 Year 1 learners. At present there are 250 year 1 learners. It is not possible to just achieve such an increase in cohort without putting in place the infrastructure which allows parents a choice in the language of education they wish to choose for their child.

What plans are in place to staff such provision whilst there is a current shortage of staff able to teach and support through the medium of Welsh?

Recruitment and retention of staff is an issue. There are schools who are unable to source Welsh speaking supply teachers. Funding has been made available for Welsh Medium primary teachers to retrain as specialist secondary teachers.

Welsh speaking supply staff are available at a premium. What action is being taken to address this issue?

Under the Powys County Council Vision 2025 has a workstream entitled Workforce Futures. This is examining the possibility to establish an Academy for Health, Care and Education but this does not help the position now. It is necessary to grow the number of welsh speakers and to an extent this is a chicken and egg situation.

Recommended that a document library be made available for people wishing to understand the process to date when replying to the engagement questions.

The next stage of the process will be a paper outlining a revised Vision for Education in Powys, guiding principles and an implementation plan. Scrutiny will be challenging the proposals both on the ambition and pace of change. If scrutiny is of the view that the service is coasting then this would be challenged.

What measures have been taken to allow head teachers from small schools to take part in the Education Conference?

Funding has been provided to allow small schools to arrange supply cover to release the head teacher to attend the conference. At the last conference 40 primary schools (out of 57) were represented. Head teachers from the remaining schools attended cluster meetings. There was discussion amongst the head teacher community after the last Conference and it is hoped that more head teachers will make arrangements to be able to attend the planned Conference in February.

Cllr B Davies left 16:07

It was confirmed that the service are currently examining the proposed questions and rewording them before they are published for engagement. Scrutiny Members will individually be able to respond directly to the engagement questions.

Members congratulated Officers on the work that had been undertaken to date which was considered to be an improvement on previous documents that had been presented. Members and Officers undertook to work closely on the progress of this programme undertaking their respective roles appropriately.

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| 5. | MINUTES |
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The Chair was authorised to sign the minutes of the meetings held on the 7th October 2019, 30th October 2019, 18th November 2019 and 29th November 2019.

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| 6. | CHAIR'S BRIEFING |
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The Chair advised that he had attended a Welsh Government briefing regarding the change in reporting school standards statistics with the Interim Head of Service and Vice-Chair. There was disquiet amongst the attendees regarding the lack of a common set of data for benchmarking but Welsh Government were concerned that producing this data could result in a perverse outcomes. Welsh Government were suggesting scrutiny should visit schools to gain a perspective from the school floor. Welsh Government are intending to consider the feedback and convene a further conference later in the year examining school improvement.

The Vice-Chair and Chair have continued with their monthly meetings with the Head of Service with a focus on work programming.

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| 7. | WORK PROGRAMME |
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The work programme as outlined in the agenda was confirmed subject to a need to look for a new date to undertake pre-Cabinet scrutiny of School Transformation ahead of the planned Cabinet meeting on 7th April.

County Councillor P Roberts (Chairman)

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