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Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee Wednesday, 13 September 2023

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LEARNING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD BY ZOOM ON WEDNESDAY, 13TH SEPTEMBER 2023

Present:

County Councillor Gwynfor Thomas (Chair)

County Councillors: G D Jones, D Bebb, M Beecham, AW Davies, D Meredith, G Morgan, and G Preston.

Co-opted Member: K Chedgzoj, S Davies, M Evitts.

Cabinet portfolio Holders in Attendance:

County Councillors:

P Roberts, Cabinet Member for a Learning Powys.

D Thomas, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation.

J Charlton, Cabinet Member for a Greener Powys.

Officers: Lynette Lovell, Director of Education and Children's Services, Georgie Bevan, Head of Schools Service, Eurig Towns Schools Service Improvement Manager, Sarah Quibell, Service Manager for Education Support Services.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor Sue McNicholas.

2. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members relating to items for consideration on the agenda.

3. DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP

The Committee did not receive any 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.

4. MINUTES

Documents Considered:

- Minutes 19th July 2023

Minutes agreed by Committee members present as a true and accurate reflection of the meetings and authorised accordingly by the Chair.

5. PERFORMANCE AND RISK Q1

Background:

The Corporate and Strategic Equality Plan contains the priority work for the Council, driven by the Cabinets ambitions.

Scrutiny Committees have been requested to review the 3 well-being objectives:

1. Improving awareness of the Councils services and how the public can access to make informed choices.
2. Good quality sustainable employment, training opportunities and pursuing the living wage accreditation.
3. Tackling poverty and inequality.

Learning and Skills would have an impact on access to services, the workforce, poverty, and inequality.

The scorecard records how services have delivered against objectives, what future actions are required, and lessons learned.

Schools Service have made significant progress on the Child Poverty Plan within Q1. the provision of cookery lessons to parents in the south of Powys has led to potential employment within the catering service.

Points raised by the Panel:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members.
With regard to Objective 1, Intervention and Prevention what level of children are benefitting.	Teams at all different levels, the Youth Service provide intervention at key points. The Schools Service continue to work closely with Children’s Services and Commissioning across the different age spectrums. The Service has Education Welfare Officers and Family Liaison Officers having utilised the Community Schools and the Family Liaison Manager grants to assist recruitment and also support schools further afield. In addition to statutory work undertaken, the service has invested the grant funding into those areas and implemented support not only with learners but with their families.
In relation to the public consultation, it is worrying that the public do not seem to see the importance of the consultations, which is borne out through the disappointing number of responses. How can the Council make sure that the public are encouraged to get involved and reassure that their response and participation are valued when decisions are made.	
Committee member expressed concern at the equality of service delivery across Powys, the Deputy Leader of the Council was challenged prior to the summer holidays as to what was available, in particular in the Llanfyllin area, amongst a whole raft of projects listed including SHEP, nothing	In response to the SHEP programme eligibility, 7 schools took part in this programme across Powys, renamed Food and Fun, over the summer period. There was very clear criteria for which schools could apply. The application round for next year is commencing shortly and remains

<p>was available. We have heard of various pilot projects being undertaken, however under the banner of Fairer in the Councils objectives, equality of service delivery across Powys is lacking.</p> <p>How many schools deliver Early Year provision within every school catchment across Powys, are there indicators to show equality of service delivery.</p> <p>Under objective 2, it must be noted that Powys are already a Real Living Wage employer, what difference will Powys residents see if Powys CC is an accredited Real Living Wage employer.</p> <p>Aware objectives reflect the Corporate and Strategic Equality Plan, perhaps focus should be on annual review of the plan.</p>	<p>according to the eligibility of Free School Meals provision within that school, this cannot be provided across the cluster with schools staff working through the summer period. The programme is fully funded via grant by the WG with the noted criteria threshold.</p> <p>We can assure that the support for all Powys schools in a phased approach around the RADY (Raising Attainment of Disadvantaged Young People) agenda and built into the Child Poverty taskforce. The programme does not depend on numbers of disadvantaged children but concerned with enabling teachers and the school to provide a more usable approach in their teaching to support all learners but particularly those more vulnerable. Powys have been chosen, due to the strong School Foundation team, to pilot RADY into the foundation phase.</p> <p>Within the Service, EWO's and Attendance Officers are providing a more holistic approach to support the whole family across all schools.</p> <p>Cabinet Member responded to the impact a Real Living Wage employer accreditation would have on residents in Powys was around contract management with Powys CC's suppliers bringing distinct and positive benefits across the Powys economy.</p>
<p>The Corporate Plan and objectives needs more relevance, how was the Stronger Fairer Greener plan incorporated into education. Committee would like to see more evidence and outcomes of links to schools and the workforce brought to Scrutiny Committee.</p>	<p>Will improve upon narrative and evidencing outcomes for Q2</p>

Actions

- **Committee would like to see more evidence and outcomes of links to schools and the workforce brought to the Scrutiny Committee.**
School Service to improve upon evidencing pupils outcomes for Q2.

6. UPDATE ON EARLY YEARS PROVISION

Background:

Report shared within the agenda pack on Early Years Provision standards, progress, and outcomes for learners.

Points raised by the Panel:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members.
<p>What percentage of pupils have taken advantage of the 10hrs and accessed Early Years provision.</p>	<p>The numbers are approximately 1688 out of approximately 2400 pupils who had accessed education, some have taken the full 10hrs allocation others have taken a percentage. There are other children who access childminding or nursery provision, Powys does not allocate to these settings, with other children due to our borders accessing provision in other counties or in England.</p>
<p>Does the service have a breakdown of the demography</p>	<p>There are 72 setting within Powys, with places allocated to all early learners. Over the last 5 years, learners have all received places within their requested clusters.</p>
<p>Roughly a third of pupils are not accessing Early Year provision, has work been undertaken to understand reasons or barriers why offer was not accessed.</p>	<p>Some places not taken up due to where parents are working or other personal circumstances, placing into childcare or private nursery provision that provide 30hrs provision, and who can obtain the 10hrs funding via WG, although the 10hrs is non-statutory. Some Powys settings only provide the 10hrs of education, without further wrap around childcare provision.</p>
<p>What are the reasons preventing Powys making those 10hr provisions into 30hours wrap around care settings.</p>	<p>Powys is only able to provide the 10hrs contract for the educational provision, if settings at their discretion wished to provide 30hrs they could do. There are different regulations for 30hrs to 10hrs provision as the 30 hours is only childcare provision.</p>
<p>Welsh medium provision has been static for some time, it is a problem that requires a solution.</p> <p>WESP has not been proactive with progress not realised; the geographical spread has not changed at all.</p>	<p>Work is undertaken with Mudiad Meithrin, including settings in Machynlleth and Ystradgynlais converting to Welsh medium provision in the last two years.</p> <p>The WESP has looked to increasing the provision of Welsh medium education again with support from Mudiad Meithrin.</p> <p>WESP continues to build on access for</p>

<p>The problem is that the 26% quoted is more like 60% of pupils in a setting.</p>	<p>all learners to a Welsh medium option. In the first year of the new WESP, the move to Welsh is working throughout the County, the target is 30% and it is hoped to build on this further.</p> <p>We acknowledge there needs to be improvement from Primary Sector to Secondary. Where Early Years is provided through the medium of Welsh there has been a greater number of learners transitioning into Welsh medium Primary Education.</p>
<p>The Scrutiny Committee has requested a number of years ago the actual amount the County had saved by the raising of the school age to 5years.</p>	<p>Assurance given that within the 3+ settings, there is a very strong Estyn profile in terms of pupil outcomes, standards, provision, and leadership. In terms of monitoring the savings made this could be included in a future meeting, following discussion with finance colleagues.</p> <p>Funding received from WG which stands at £5 per child is being used on Early Years education.</p>
<p>The Incredible Years programme was brought into Powys in 1993 is this required again.</p>	<p>Incredible Beginnings was brought in 2020 by Caroline Webster Stratton who designed the Incredible Years programme in 1993, as realised there were issues which required to be addressed with much younger pupils. The programme has been well received by Powys settings as a programme to support our learners, post pandemic.</p> <p>Powys have also been using the Well-Com programme.</p> <p>Post pandemic, settings were noticing issues with speech and language, with an increased number of referrals to SALT.</p> <p>Training has been rolled out to address these particular issues as well as to take the education platform forward.</p>
<p>Is ALN (Additional Learning Need) dealt with through Early Years provision as per Schools.</p>	<p>Same systems are available to Early Years provision under the ALNET, as ALN is from 0-25yrs.</p> <p>TYFI system is used to record support. The training has been made available to settings as per schools through working with the ALN team to address ALN needs.</p>

<p>How does the funding work</p>	<p>Settings do not have specific ALN allocated funding but have access to the ALN team. They can apply for funding through the TYFI system. With support given relevant to the needs of each pupil. ALN support is not based on geography but the needs of the individual learner.</p>
<p>Are settings funded on £5 per hour</p>	<p>No, they are not yet funded at £5 per hour. When settings were established, Powys designed a funding formula that would ensure all settings were able to function. The settings range from 8 to 85 children, we required a system where there were sufficient staff in settings. The ratio was 2adults :16children with a continuing ratio of 1:8 thereafter.</p> <p>WG have now stipulated that all LA's from 2024 fund at £5 per hour for the 10hrs of Education.</p> <p>This would apply pressure to settings especially those that have less than 8 children to have funding to pay for the 2 members of staff required. The CIW (Care Inspectorate Wales) regulations stipulates there must be 2 members of staff.</p> <p>We have been phasing the new regulations in and looking at ways that those settings with low numbers can be supported and remain financially viable.</p>
<p>Concern held for those smaller settings under the new funding formula</p>	<p>More support has been provided and explains the reasons for not changing immediately from the current funding formula to the £5per hour, as aware of the concerns. We continue to look at solutions with those particular settings as to how to proceed under the new regulations.</p> <p>Under the new contracts, settings need to know if they are financially viable, can they provide the service Powys requires, a huge element of this would be funding. Over the next year work will be undertaken around will this work what can we do, can children be taken slightly earlier to assist with finances as the overarching concern is that existing provision be maintained.</p>

Settings numbers are volatile year on year does this cause problems.	Yes, it does, attendance figures do change, and we do not want to lose our Welsh provision settings, it is an important part of education provision in Powys
This could be an issue that we revisit for updates throughout the year.	

Actions

- **Committee requested the actual amount the County had saved by the raising of the school age to 5years.** In terms of monitoring the savings made this could be included in a future meeting, following discussion with finance colleagues.

7. CURRICULUM FOR WALES

Committee decided to hold item over until the next available meeting.

8. SECONDARY SCHOOLS IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY - PROGRESSION AND LEARNING

Background

Report shared within the agenda pack on School Improvement Strategy setting out the background and progress of the strategy from February 2021 to May 2023. May 2023 received an improvement conference undertaken alongside Estyn culminating in an Action Plan, currently being implemented. Presentation given to Committee on the Post Estyn visit Action Plan.

Action Plan 6 Key Priorities:

1. Learning and teaching
2. Improve relationships with Headteachers.
3. Review reporting including the School Support log system.
4. Professional development.
5. Performance Management
6. Ensure that support has a positive effect on school improvement, it is consistent, and the team evaluate its effect.

Main focus for this year is to: Improve the quality of teaching and learning experiences across Powys secondary and all-age schools.

Points raised by the Panel:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members.
A detailed Action Plan with a high level of work to be undertaken, did this all come from the recent Improvement visits earlier this year.	A large proportion came from the visits but also from the internal evaluations undertaken throughout the year, which included feedback from Headteachers and schools. The Director for Education confirmed that Estyn reviewed the Inspection recommendations from 2019 and 2021

	<p>for the recent extended visit. The visit was robust involving Headteacher, stakeholder groups and Scrutiny Chair discussions. An outcome letter was provided to the Interim CEO, with points to consider and verbal areas for improvement and monitoring moving forward. For information purposes the link Inspector visits half-termly.</p> <p>5 Secondary schools are due inspections through this academic year, reports will be brought to Scrutiny Committee to monitor progress, how effective the support has been and how effectively the schools have delivered this support.</p>
<p>There seems to be a disconnect between the presentation given and the report, 5 conclusions of the short-term priorities, the first 4 conclusions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the quality of learning, improving self-evaluation, • Improving standards of literacy • Improving attendance <p>Surely these are always priority areas which could be at the end of any report concerning education as very generic. Would prefer to see more specific short-term targets.</p> <p>Chair interjected that Scrutiny have not received enough information to form judgements as to whether outcomes are being achieved. In addition, schools with concerns are not being highlighted.</p>	<p>The report is evaluating progress on the Secondary Strategy, to map the way forward. The plan for secondary and all age improvement, sits behind the Strategy, updated in May 2023 outlining more precisely the improvement priorities in schools.</p> <p>The action plan relates to the way the Schools Service team works with and supports schools to have as much impact as possible.</p>
<p>What is the baseline referred to in Pt 2.7 of the report, is this the same for Welsh and English medium schools, as the baseline for provision of Welsh medium education is effectively non-existent.</p>	<p>In January 2023 visits were undertaken to all schools in Powys, information gathered was used to establish the baseline of provision across the secondary, all age, dual stream, and Welsh medium. Each school received a report tailored to their own priorities, which forms the Secondary Improvements Plan.</p>
<p>On developing a baseline of provision would this outline what the fundamental curriculum should be for</p>	<p>This related to knowing the schools well, work alongside schools and evaluate where they were in terms of</p>

<p>each secondary school pupil.</p> <p>Baseline is formed on the self-evaluation rather than educational provision. The quality of teaching rather than what is being taught.</p> <p>Is there a baseline for the breadth of curriculum offer in Secondary Schools.</p> <p>How can improvement be measured in dual stream education specifically the Welsh Medium subject offer. Parents should be informed of what the actual provision given is.</p>	<p>self-evaluation, learning and teaching, pupil literacy and numeracy skills. There were some key themes that were seen across the spectrum, however work undertaken to support the schools to identify their unique key priorities.</p> <p>The baseline is not the breadth of offer, it is the teaching provision in schools to enable the progression in learning. Reviewing the quality of the learning from the teaching and the teaching and the learning in one.</p> <p>We are working on the Curriculum mapping for Scrutiny and information is required from the individual schools as to subjects taught across years 7 to 10. Information can be accessed for GCSE and A level outcomes.</p> <p>This will be included in the information noted above for Scrutiny.</p>
<p>A baseline has been established for all schools, we look at the finances of schools on an anonymised basis, which schools are causing concern, what are the influencing factors, could similar information be sourced for the standards of education as well as assurance be given for continuous improvement.</p>	<p>Individual schools do have those reports, to inform the improvement plan re: key themes, which could be shared.</p> <p>There would be comprehensive reports by Estyn on the 5 schools due inspections in the academic year.</p> <p>As part of the report, references to “most, many” used the evaluative Estyn language to how terminology references numbers. Service to share terminology table with Scrutiny.</p> <p>The criteria held on schools causing concern includes deficit budgets but also a plethora of other data, HR, leadership capacity. The Secondary Team have produced data on standards provision, leadership, self-evaluation, and effectiveness of the data on each school. Good practice should also be shared, and the Service will continue to work with Scrutiny as to the best methods to bring information forward.</p>

	<p>We are waiting on the verified data from the full exams undertaken in the summer of 2023 to share with Scrutiny to allow for benchmarking against the whole of Wales.</p> <p>We should not be waiting for Estyn reports, we should be able, as an improvement team, to identify the areas of schools need. As a result of our own evaluation, we have the action plan to make sure we improve going forward and welcome Scrutiny Committee to monitor progress.</p>
<p>The Chair requested that Scrutiny need to see evidence via Estyn reports, previously received the information provided by ERW, we have requested on numerous occasions to have information in relation to schools causing concern, we need to be seeking assurance that our schools are on the right track with progress made.</p>	
<p>Powys does not have a single secondary school that is fully Welsh medium. Unsure if Estyn would have confidence in the performance of Secondary Welsh medium education provision in Powys.</p> <p>In the report shared, Welsh medium education is mentioned 3 times, therefore Scrutiny do not learn anything on the state of Welsh medium education provision. There should have been a whole section focussed on the provision of Welsh medium education across Powys, as there has been no progress made over a number of years</p>	<p>Support for the development of the Welsh language educational provision has been highlighted as an area of priority.</p> <p>There is not currently a Welsh speaking Officer in the Secondary School Improvement Team as have been challenges with recruitment process i.e., no applications.</p> <p>The Schools Services have brokere4d support for Welsh medium education through the MWEP (Mid Wales Education Partnership) all dual stream schools have Welsh medium officers involved equitable to officers supporting the English streams.</p> <p>The provision of a dedicated Welsh medium SIA is something we need to consider going forward.</p>
<p>Concern raised for those schools who have not made progress against their development plans.</p>	<p>Training on school development planning was provided, with 1:1 support by their SIA's.</p> <p>Schools where improvement was not made had more intensive support across the summer term. This year's Schools development plans are due to be submitted by the 15th September.</p>

<p>It is worrying to note that on many occasions teachers have a low expectation of the pupils' achievement capabilities.</p> <p>Could Scrutiny be provided with the guarantee that SIA's, subject advisors are ensuring all schools are meeting targets.</p>	<p>The Action plan notes clear and focussed actions to support schools with improving learning and teaching experiences achievements for learners. SIA's have ben into schools to discuss steps to be taken, outlining support, and ensuring officers are in schools advising what good teaching and learning looks like, brokering support through the professional learning team and Cluster insets for learning and progression, strong pedagogy.</p> <p>If SIA's were concerned that particular school were not focussed on areas of required improvement, this is escalated, with schools also invited to support and challenge meetings.</p>
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9.	ADMISSIONS CODE & CAPACITY
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Presentation on Admission Arrangements provided by Sarah Quibell.

Background:

Admission Arrangements are governed by the following Welsh Government Legislation and guidance:

- Measuring the capacity of school in Wales 2011, which details that:
 - 'The admission number is the number of pupils who should be admitted to a relevant age group if sufficient applications for places are received.'
 - 'Pupils may not be refused a place until the admission number is reached.'
 - 'The number is calculated by dividing the capacity by the number of year groups to be accommodated by the school.'
- Schools admission code: Statutory Code document no:005/2013.
- School admission appeals code: Statutory Code document no:007/2013.
- There are 3 types of admission application Primary, Secondary in year transfers.
- Admission arrangements by the LA covers all schools with exception of the 7 voluntary aided and faith schools, who undertake their own admissions, and the 3 Special schools and the Pupil Referral Unit which have specific admissions processes based on pupil need.
- The LA has a statutory requirement to consult on admissions arrangements an annual basis, between 1st Sept and 1st March.
- Admission arrangements are determined by the 15th April and must be published by October. Powys usually publish during August, for the following academic year.

- The Admissions Timetable outlines the Common Offer Dates for the Primary & Secondary School Admission Rounds, the latest date for appeals to be received, and date by which appeals must be heard.
- Statutory limits on Infant classes exists as should not contain more than 30 pupil, however, there may some certain limited exceptions to this.
- The scope of an admission appeal panel to uphold an appeal for an admissions application that has been refused on class size prejudice grounds are limited.
- The appeals process is made up of two stages Factual and Balancing, the appeals panel has to be independent of the LA, with a split between panellists with previous education experience and lay members.
- The decision by the Appeals Panel is binding on the LA and the school involved.

Points raised by the Panel:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members.
What formula is used	The Welsh Government formula is provided in the measuring the capacity of schools in Wales document, which reviews the number of class bases, size of staff room, toilet provision, corridor space. Headteacher would provide the information to the Property Team, to run data through the formula,
Aware of cases where pupils have been refused a place where there have been no discussions with head teachers or governors.	The LA is the admission authority for all schools, with the exclusion of the 7 voluntary aided and faith schools. We admit up until the admission number has been reached and then applications would be refused.
There are issues with schools where they have not reached capacity	If in relation to a specific school, will take conversation out of this arena.
Clarity required for parents and learners over catchment areas.	Consultation will be undertaken prior to March 1 st , 2024, and will have close alignment to the transport policy.
Lack of information to parents, publications of catchment areas needs to be completed.	There is requirement is to consult with Governing bodies however we also ensure information circulated to Head Teachers, as well as parents, as required.
If a school has a chosen catchment secondary school, there is no leeway within the admission code for a learner to choose another alternative secondary school	In the admission code parental preference is key, a parent can choose any school. In an over-subscription scenario, the published criteria would be applied, and the places allocated accordingly. There is a published Transport Policy which dictates who would be eligible for that transport.
The scenario above of two separate	In terms of a received application, there

<p>catchment, without discussion with Headteachers and Governors, without discussion with the High school Governors, this could change the balances of the pupils in the high school, surely this should be discussed with all parties. Where would the concept of catchments come into the scenario.</p>	<p>is a parental right to apply to any school they desire, if there are places, the LA are obliged to allocate. It would not be appropriate to hold discussions with Head Teacher or Governor concerning individual pupils. The catchment area would come into play in an over-subscription criteria situation.</p>
<p>Where a Primary school has chosen a catchment Secondary School, the Secondary School would have not had any influence on this decision and would therefore limit the choice to that prescribed by the Governing Body of the Primary School.</p>	<p>The schools would be referred to the published formal admission arrangements which would be for the school to give a response on any proposed changes when the consultation is opened.</p>
<p>Are Secondary schools part of the consultation on Primary schools.</p>	<p>In terms of admissions consultation, the proposed admissions arrangements are forwarded to all Governing Bodies, neighbouring LA's, Diocesan Representatives and to all head teachers of all schools.</p>
<p>In Primary schools the Head Teacher determines which pupils go into which class i.e., 2-year groups in one classroom etc. The Admissions team officers would be informed when classroom capacity has been reached.</p>	<p>The arrangement of classes is an operational school decision. This would be a separate matter under the pupil admissions number, and how many pupils a school can safely accommodate. If there is a change to the use of space within a school, the headteacher should request a review of the building capacity assessment which may result in an amended admissions number.</p>
<p>How many admission applications have Powys rejected, and how many appeals have been won or lost.</p>	<p>Do not have the figures on the number of rejected applications, 93 appeals were submitted in 2022-23, appeals can be stood down if places become available, not all 93 progressed to the appeals stage. approximately 60-65 % were upheld.</p>
<p>Were the appeals predominantly Primary or High School appeals. Information to be shared to Committee members, outside of this forum where issues may exist.</p>	<p>There have been as many in-year appeals as there were for Primary and Secondary, some of which are still in progress.</p>

Actions:

Appeals for 2022-23 for Primary, Secondary and In-Year - School Service to provide information to Committee members, outside of this forum, for where issues may exist.

10.	WORK PROGRAMME
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To be reviewed at the next available meeting.

**County Councillor
R G Thomas (Chair)**