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Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee Wednesday, 13 December 2023

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

Present:

County Councillor Gwynfor Thomas (Chair)

County Councillors: D Bebb, AW Davies, B Davies, D Meredith, G Morgan, S McNicholas, G Preston, L Roberts

Co-opted Member: K Chedgzoy, 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

Officers: Georgie Bevan, Head of Schools Service, Sarah Quibell, Service Manager for Education Support Services, Eurig Towns Service Manager for Primary School Improvement, Bethan Price Cymraeg Lead, Mari Thomas Deputy Head of Finance, Chris Davies Service Manager for Curriculum for Wales and Professional Learning, Bets Ingram Strategic Equalities and Risk Officer

Lynette Lovell, Director of Education and Children Services joined late, due to other business commitments

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor G D Jones

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 17th October 2023.

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

5.	ELECTION OF MEMBER TO THE PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
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Due to the recent by-election results, there will be a review of the allocation of seats across committees, this item was postponed until further notice.

6.	WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN (WESP) FIRST YEAR EVALUATION REPORT AND FEEDBACK REPORT FROM WELSH GOVERNMENT.
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Background: -

- First annual report of 10, addressing Powys' priorities within the WESP.
- Feedback received from WG received in November, meeting scheduled next week for discussion on next steps.

Points raised by the Panel:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members.
Outcome 1	
In relation to Outcome 1 has there been improvement on previous year, are the trends moving in the right direction as difficult to understand without full context. Could the class sizes be shared, to provide Committee with the links across the various outcomes of the WESP.	In the WESP document there is all the pre-data which has led to information produced and held by WG and PCC to inform the next stages. Data has remained stable at 36.4% for Welsh medium nursery provision. The transfer to school was 80% of those in Cylch Meithrin 2021/22 to 87.5% in 2022/23 therefore an improvement in the percentage of numbers retained.
The LA has funded Mudiad Meithrin / language Support Officer to support the Welsh Language skills of practitioners in 3+ settings, what is the costs and for how long is that post costed for given that Mudiad Meithrin are a voluntary organisation, what outcomes are hoped to be achieved.	This does not form part of the current TROCHI, this post was of a temporary contract for specific support for specific settings and was not currently funded. Will forward further details to committee on the outcomes of that particular work.
Within the WESP there was an intention to develop Cylch Meithrin in the Carreghoffa Arddleen, Four Crosses and Llandysilio area, however no reference in the annual report, what was the current status	This was not one of the designated areas to be prioritised at this time. The WESP covers a 10-year programme, in this year the focus was on Hay-on - Wye area as currently there was no Welsh medium provision at all. There was Welsh medium provision within the Llanfyllin catchment area, with the aim of ensuring these were at capacity. The Arddleen, Carreghoffa area has been identified an area for development over the 10-year period of the WESP, with development

	<p>commencing from July 2027. There are 5 areas in the WESP in need of improving provision, Hay-on - Wye, Crickhowell, Presteigne, Llanidloes then Arddleen area, work will be undertaken for one of those areas per annum over the first five years.</p>
<p>The equality of provision was varied across the county, not just the 5 areas mentioned. Cylch Meithrin and Ti a Fi provision was very much dependent on volunteers, and the bureaucracy involved in setting up a new provision made it more difficult, could this be addressed in any way.</p>	<p>There are issues with per pupil funding for very small settings which would determine whether they could be financially viable.</p>
<p>Were WG informed of issues in rural areas, the need for accessible and equitable provision, which was currently non-existent, to be addressed.</p>	<p>There were regular meeting with WG in relation to Welsh medium education and early years education. Officers hold monthly meetings with Mudiad Meithrin, who are keen to ensure WG are aligning funds towards Welsh medium education provision.</p>
<p>Outcome 2</p>	
<p>Not all pupils from entering Welsh medium reception have come via Cylch Meithrin.</p>	<p>Not all settings need to be registered with Cylch Meithrin to provide a Welsh medium education. WG provide PCC with data and information from Mudiad Meithrin which allows tracking of pupils and was where the 87% noted under Outcome 1 came from.</p>
<p>Was there a clear education pathway for children or were children leaving Cylch in an area where the local or nearest school did not provide Welsh medium education.</p>	<p>Work on the Hay-on-Wye area with Mudiad Meithrin has enabled Powys to understand that there was no point in having a Ti a Fi, Cylch Meithrin and then no further provision for Welsh medium education. Discussions are being progressed with the Gwernyfed catchment of schools to ensure there was transition into early primary school phases.</p>
<p>Was the 87.5% all pupils transferring into Welsh medium education or just those from Cylch Meithrin.</p>	<p>The 87.5% was pupils just from Cylch Meithrin, there would be others transferring in from other settings, or parents have chosen Welsh medium education and have not been through an early years setting.</p>
<p>The document stated that a website had been developed alongside social media channels, was there an indication of usage data by parents of these resources.</p>	<p>The website was formed in 2021. In terms of the social media presence, through discussion with Communications Dept. it is quite difficult to build the followership, work</p>

	<p>is being progressed with schools to share messages as they have a well-developed audience.</p>
<p>It was documented that TROCHI immersion centres had been established as support for latecomers to the Welsh language, this has happened on three occasions, Dafydd Llwyd twice and Llanfyllin. Request made for new phraseology to distinguish between late comers model and the TROCHI model for Yrs. 6 & 7, in addition there should be reference to a Bi-bilingual education and English education, it was the outcomes that count.</p>	<p>There is also confusion with the TROCHI early education and the TROCHI methodology was a different model again, this would be something that the National network of TROCHI practitioners need to review to ensure a consistent national approach as well as the phraseology used. Will share this with WG when meet next to get as for a consistency across the national picture. With TROCHI it was felt that a more centralised provision could be more accessible and available throughout the year or 2 terms of the academic year, although the geography of Powys would still present challenge.</p>
<p>There were a number of initiatives mentioned within the document however unsure of progression or outcomes, there was not much analysis included, how many hours was spent on projects that did not progress and could have been used more constructively on viable and deliverable projects.</p>	<p>Actual hours was not known but through Consultations on schools closure all options had to be evaluated. There was a lot of activity in the first year of the WESP. Work has to be prioritised otherwise risk of becoming disparate in the approach.</p>
<p>If Powys were determined to have more Welsh medium language schools, there must be progression along the linguistic spectrum, how many schools have mentioned an intention of this progression, especially those of a dual stream provision.</p>	<p>All schools are moving along the continuum, work is underway with Bro Caereinion. Discussions are ongoing with several schools to ensure they have the school development plans to follow the continuum and improve the provision of Welsh medium education.</p> <p>As the White paper goes through Government and if the Bill would be accepted, there would be an expectation that every school, whatever their circumstances, would progress along the language continuum. However, no school, with the exception of Bro Caereinion, which was still under a consultation process, had mentioned any intention of moving along the continuum to be fully Welsh medium. Every school, has been made aware of their linguistic category within the new category system, from which to progress.</p>

<p>There has always been discussion about moving along the continuum, with the aim to do better, however the crux of the matter was if want to produce Welsh speakers, there has to be bi-lingual education for all. It was disappointing that no other school other than Bro Caereinion had mentioned their intention to do this, was this entirely decisions made by Head Teachers and Governors or could the LA influence them.</p>	<p>Ysgol Dyffryn Trannon and Ysgol Cribarth have moved along the continuum. The decision must come from the school, the LA can advise and support which is a better method than dictating the position.</p> <p>Some schools have mentioned the intention to increase the amount of Welsh medium teaching used, but it was important to note that the categories in the WESP are far broader with multiple elements which would require completion prior to progressing to the next category. Cabinet Member added that Ysgol Cribarth was being actively monitored as it formally moves along the continuum to a dual stream setting. Admissions would be monitored over the next few years in the hope of an organic change toward a fully Welsh medium provision.</p> <p>We remain aware that Powys has a teaching related issue, if not sufficient nor the ability within the current staff to offer a full Welsh medium experience, additional staff would be required which creates further challenge.</p>
<p>Acknowledgement of the poorer experience pupils have had and that there was a reluctance to move along the continuum amongst some groups, dual stream schools are effectively dual standard schools. Further promotion was needed with videos shared with all schools with an offer, to distribute to parents and pupils.</p>	
<p>Outcomes 3 &4</p>	
<p>There must be emphasis on the importance of the numbers of pupils moving from one medium to another. Were schools providing data and how was this collected.</p>	<p>Yes, where pupils are not receiving bi-lingual but Welsh medium lessons. The Arweinydd Cymraeg (Welsh Lead Officer) was responsible for collecting this data from schools. A sample of a survey from parents and pupils would be sufficient to test the accuracy of the data provided.</p> <p>The 14+Lead Officer was currently carrying out a mapping exercise at Key Stage 4 to look at the offer both vocationally, academically and language delivery to address the point that have been made by Committee</p>

	Members on provision and language delivery across the spectrum to ensure equity. There was also a clear picture on Post 16 provision following improvements in the data capture processes, course delivery, learner numbers and language delivery.
Outcome 5 – No questions forthcoming from the Committee.	
Outcome 6 – No questions forthcoming from the Committee.	
Outcome 7 – No questions forthcoming from the Committee.	
Welsh Government Feedback document	
Request for Committee to have sight of the LA's response to the WG feedback to follow the progression.	Accepted that for future updates the documentation and data would be provided and presented in a more suitable format for the Scrutiny Committee.

Actions

Observations:

Scrutiny made the following observations:

- The Committee requested that:
 - Assurance be given on pace of the development of WESP timeline in particular the development in the North of the County in relation to the Llanfyllin Catchment Schools Transformation programme.

7. STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

Background: - The Corporate Risk Register was circulated with agenda papers prior to the meeting.

Risk PPPP0031 - If the school building stock deteriorates due to the insufficient level of revenue and major improvement capital funding required to maintain them, then they could become un-safe and not fit for purpose.

Points raised by the Panel:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members.
Comments were invited on the building deterioration risk as closely linked to the Sustainable Communities for Learning Transformation Programme, with the schools Transformation capital maintenance programmes significantly pushed back i.e., a £400k maintenance	The position on schools within the Llanfyllin Catchment review has been determined by the WG under Band C, and additionally affected by the collapse of Dawnus which limited the ability to bring forward new projects. Officers were now preparing

<p>backlog at a potential receiving in school in the north of the County</p>	<p>submissions to WG. In respect of the wider schools estate there is an oversight, fire inspections have largely been completed, work has been prioritised for the safeguarding measures e.g., fencing highlighted in Estyn reports, with funding from the schools major improvements budget, and there has been significant financial investment in Welshpool High School.</p>
<p>There was a £20m saving from unspent Capital monies in this financial year, resulting in an additional revenue saving was none of this earmarked for schools. What is the cost in terms of service delivery of not utilising these capital funds.</p>	<p>During a briefing on the current Welsh Fiscal analysis, it was abundantly clear that there would be a squeeze on Capital with regards WG for the foreseeable future. Cabinet have made clear that to maintain a viable capital programme would be through short-term borrowing and capital receipts. High inflation rates continue to impact on progress that could be made. The £20m has contributed saving towards the revenue budget. If were to spend the £20m, it would add approx. £1.2m to the pressures on the revenue budget in this financial year going into the next. Cabinet were concerned with protecting services moving forward, if act irresponsibly with savings now, there would be difficulties in delivering services of any value in the future.</p>
<p>Chair asked if the risk was acknowledged by the Scrutiny Committee in the correct manner, should this risk be escalated, as clearly a significant risk with no immediate resolution put forward. Were the ratings of risks which relate to Education matters totally explored.</p>	<p>The risks cannot be escalated further then at present, it is within the gift of the Scrutiny Committee to request further information from the Services Area that the risk is being managed accordingly.</p>
<p>Request made that risks to individual schools were being adequately addressed, i.e., boiler and heating issues leading to school closures, impacting on the service delivery for our children's education further documentation may assist to that reassurance.</p>	<p>Cabinet Member gave limited assurance in terms of RAAC that almost all Powys schools surveys were completed with the exception of a couple of small roof spaces, and no RAAC had been found. In respect of confidence in the structural integrity of the estate, officers had been tasked with completed full condition surveys of the entire estate, linked in with WG works on energy efficiencies, which would provide a detailed assessment</p>

	<p>of the backlogged maintenance and the state of the estate as a whole. An update was given in respect of Welshpool High School boiler work and removal of asbestos by specialist contractors whilst no pupils or staff were on site.</p> <p>Assurance given by the Head of Service that regular meetings are held between the Schools & Property Services and Head Teachers to ensure where there was urgent need of repair, that support was prioritised.</p>
<p>£2.2m was committed to capital works along with an additional £500k concession within the budget for 2023/24 which has been well underspent to date, given the awareness of the state of repairs required why have there not been more projects committed to.</p>	<p>In terms of the £2.2m there is a full programme of works, although the actual spend that has been processed through the system. The completion of works showed as an underspend currently the funds had been allocated across 33 schools which have or are benefitting from a variety of projects under the programme of works.</p> <p>Low carbon technology capital projects further supported by additional grants from WG.</p>
<p>Request for the programme of works to be shared with Scrutiny Committee</p>	<p>Will check with colleagues in Property Services and advise.</p>
<p>The risk denotes school closures where necessary for works to be completed, could a list of schools with the most significant issues to be shared with the Committee. The residual risk however remains scored at 16 and in pink, any changes made to the risk score, Committee were to be informed.</p>	<p>In terms of schools likely to close for maintenance / works to be undertaken the service works hard to ensure the situation does not arise wherever possible, with schools being safe and warm for our learners.</p> <p>The score was in respect of the total value in backlog maintenance. The residual risk remains high until the condition works have been completed.</p>
<p>Clarification requested that the surveys undertaken, which led to the delay of the distribution of the £500k budget concession monies, was for full condition surveys of Powys' school estate. Further clarification required from the Service Area concerned.</p>	<p>The delays in the distribution of the £500k were complicated by the announcement of the additional work being undertaken by WG and the need for alignment to ensure duplication of expenditure of public money was not occurring.</p>
<p>The development of the Well-Being Hub in Newtown adds to the risk as forms an important part of the Newtown Schools Transformation programme, the Committee are unaware of any further progress or outcomes from WG on this project.</p>	<p>The Scrutiny template on the Strategic Outline Case (SOC) is due to be returned to WG in the coming weeks, to be approved and progressed, aligned with the capital spend challenges to give a degree of clarity early in the New Year. In respect of the</p>

	<p>new build at Ysgol Calon Y Dderwen, if the SOC does not progress, it would not impact the funding envelope for the school build site.</p>
<p>Concern was highlighted in relation to Corporate Risk PPPP0031 and the potential partial or full school closures. Committee remained unconvinced that this risk had been fully addressed. On one side capital was squeezed with little spend and on the other, assurance given that everything was undertaken to moderate that risk. Committee needs to have a true understanding of the level risk contained within the condition surveys for individual schools.</p>	

Actions

1. Request for the programme of works to be shared with Scrutiny Committee – **Email sent to Property Services.**
2. Clarification requested that the surveys undertaken, which led to the delay of the distribution of the £500k budget concession monies, was for full condition surveys of Powys' school estate. **Further clarification required from the Service Area concerned**
3. Any changes made to the risk score; Scrutiny Committee were to be informed.

Observations:

Scrutiny made the following observations:

- The Committee requested that:
 - The programme of works be shared with Scrutiny Committee
 - The any changes made to the residual risk Committee were to be informed.
 - Clarification that the surveys undertaken, which led to the delay of the distribution of the £500k budget concession monies, were for full condition surveys of Powys' school estate. Further clarification required from the Service Area concerned.
- The Committee expressed concern
 - In relation to Corporate Risk PPPP0031 and the potential for partial or full school closures. Committee remained unconvinced that this risk had been fully addressed. On one side capital was squeezed with little spend and on the other, assurance given that everything was undertaken to moderate that risk. Committee needs to have a true understanding of the level risk contained within the condition surveys for individual schools.

8.	ESTYN REPORTS UPDATE
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Background: -

Primary Sector

A verbal update was provided on work undertaken in the last 2 years following previous Estyn inspections. During the pandemic inspections were suspended and re-commenced last year.

➤ **Academic Year 2020-21.**

- 9 Primary Schools inspected, of which 3 were requested to provide case studies of exceptional practice.
- Ysgol Llandinam was placed in Estyn Review, this was not a statutory follow up category, and were removed from this category in July 2023 after having made strong progress against all recommendations.

➤ **Academic Year 2022-23**

- 8 Primary schools inspected, of which 2 were requested to provide case studies of exceptional practice.
- 2 schools were placed in Estyn Review, Forden and Radnor Valley. A meeting is scheduled for later this week, with Estyn, in respect of progress Forden School have made addressing recommendations.
- Leighton Primary school was placed in need of significant improvement in June 2023, a formal category of follow-up. Schools Service are working closely with the school to ensure that their post inspection action plan is in place and acted upon.

Special Schools

- In terms of Special schools there have been no core inspections since the pandemic, Ysgol Cedewain were placed in Estyn review in January 2020 and removed from that category in October 2023.

Secondary Sector

- 2 Estyn Core Inspections had taken place in All-age and Secondary Sector since the pandemic.
 - Ysgol Calon Cymru was inspected in November 2022 and placed in Estyn Review.
 - Newtown High School had an inspection in October 2023 and the report is due imminently.
- 2 Estyn monitoring visits have been undertaken.
 - Brecon High School were in need of significant improvement, with a monitoring visit in November 2022, which resulted in categorisation of Special Measures.
 - Gwernyfed High School received a monitoring visit in October 2022 and were also placed in categorisation of Special Measures.

Points raised by the Panel:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members.
From Forden schools perspective there were concerns with the	The Schools Service and SIA's have worked with the school since Sept 2022

Inspection.	and were content with progress made to date, will discuss with Estyn.
For the school placed in Special Measures what work is being undertaken to bring them out.	Both schools concerned have a Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP) in place. They have each received a PIAP visit from Estyn to agree the plan, they received half termly multi agency meetings including SIA, LA & Estyn working together to establish with the school what support is required to progress. The LA support is clearly identified within the PIAP.
Were there any themes highlighted from Inspections	Of the 3 Secondary Schools with recommendations, common themes were noted around teaching, improving the development of literacy and numeracy skills and improvement required in leadership and self-evaluation processes. In terms of Primary Schools last year there were 27 recommendation in Primary Schools in Powys. 13 were associated with elements of teaching, Autumn term reviews have focussed on these areas and provided challenge and support.
Assurance sought that the Schools Service are working closely with and have enough capacity to support schools in preparation of the upcoming Spring inspections.	Prioritisation has been given to support those schools facing inspections. With a strong focus on improving teaching and learning
As the 4 purposes area pushed through the Secondary schools system how much emphasis have the Inspectors placed on the understanding of them in particular as improved teaching and learning are highlighted as common themes.	Inspectors have focussed on progression of learners, encompassing all the elements in the Curriculum for Wales, all of which are taken in account to formulate judgements on whether teaching is having a strong enough impact on pupil progress and learning.
Are Estyn as concerned as WG appear to be at ensuring the 4 purposes are embedded into the Secondary Education system.	Estyn have mentioned the 4 purposes within the inspection documents. Estyn start with learners and progress then move onto how the teaching has impacted on that progress.

9.	WORK PROGRAMME
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Shared with Committee for information purposes.

10. EXEMPT ITEM

RESOLVED to exclude the public for the following item of business on the grounds that there would be disclosure to them of exempt information under category 3 of The Local Authorities (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007).

The Monitoring Officer has determined that category 3 of the Access to Information Procedure Rules applies to the following item. His view on the public interest test (having taken account of the provisions of Rule 14.8 of the Council's Access to Information Rules) was that to make this information public would disclose information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

These factors in his view outweigh the public interest in disclosing this information. Members are asked to consider these factors when determining the public interest test, which they must decide when considering excluding the public from this part of the meeting.

11. SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN

Committee received a presentation from Officer in respect of Schools causing Concern.

County Councillor R G Thomas (Chair)