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Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee Friday, 17 November 2023

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LEARNING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT BY ZOOM ON FRIDAY, 17 NOVEMBER 2023

Present:

County Councillors: Lucy Roberts nominated as Chair for this meeting.
D Bebb, AW Davies, B Davies, D Meredith, G Preston. G D Jones (Vice Chair) arrived late.

Co-opted Member: K Chedgzoy, S Davies,

Cabinet portfolio Holders in Attendance:

County Councillors:

P Roberts, Cabinet Member for a Learning Powys

D Thomas, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation

Finance Panel Members in attendance for Joint Scrutiny on agenda items 7-9:

County Councillors: P Lewington, E Vaughan, C Walsh, A Jones, J Pugh

Officers: Lynette Lovell, Dir of Education and Children's Services. Georgie Bevan, Head of Schools Service, Chris Davies, Interim Service Manager for the Curriculum for Wales and Professional Learning, Jane Thomas Section 151 Officer and Head of Finance, Sarah Quibell, Service Manager for Education Support Services, Mari Thomas, Deputy Head of Finance and Nancy Owen, Finance Manager

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from:

County Councillors: G Thomas (Chair) unable to access the meeting and S McNicholas.

Co-opted Member: M Evitts.

Cabinet Member: Jackie Charlton.

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. CURRICULUM FOR WALES

Background

The 4 purposes of Curriculum for Wales for a shared vision and aspiration for every child and young person which align with Powys' Corporate and Strategic Equity Plan Stronger fairer Greener are:

1. Ambitious, capable learners.
2. Enterprising creative contributors.
3. Healthy confident individuals.
4. Ethical informed citizens.

The Curriculum for Wales framework assist practitioners to develop a more integrated approach to learning. The 6 areas of learning and experience are:

1. Expressive Arts.
2. Health and Well-being.
3. Humanities.
4. Languages, Literacy and Communication.
5. Mathematics and Numeracy.
6. Science and Technology.

The Curriculum for Wales Guidance promotes collaboration and cross disciplinary planning, learning, and teaching both within and across the 6 areas noted above. Within the 6 areas there are 27 mandatory statements of What Matters. These statements ensure a level of consistency in Curriculum design across schools and settings and learners must develop an understanding of all 27 statements.

Most schools in Powys are engaging positively with Curriculum for Wales. Feedback from schools has informed that the professional learning on offer in Powys was of a high quality and easily accessible. Schools are provided with a Blended Professional Learning offer which has included universal bespoke support online and face-to-face training.

Primary and Secondary practitioners in Powys are co-designing a curriculum that would progress with the learner.

In September 2021 Powys launched the Pedagogy Leads Programme from WG funding, who:

1. Share knowledge and experience with Practitioners
2. Plan and facilitate termly networks across the MWEF.
3. Conduct Professional enquiry projects.
4. Facilitating and attending WG National Networks

Points raised by the Panel:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members.
It was stated that most school are engaging positively with Curriculum for Wales, what would happen to those schools that were not and where would they stand on inspection.	The Schools Service continues to support all schools with the Curriculum for Wales roll-out, through the SIA's ensuring that expectations and requirements on the mandatory elements are met.
What rights do children in Wales have under the Curriculum for Wales to receive lessons through the medium of	Welsh is a mandatory element for the Curriculum for Wales. All schools with be teaching either first or second

Welsh.	language medium of Welsh. Welsh language schools are support through Cwricwlwm yng Nghymru.
What expectations were there for a child to receive all lessons through the medium of Welsh under this new Curriculum	There has been a focus on the literacy element within the Curriculum for Wales, called trans-linguaging. It is an expectation within the Welsh Curriculum that pupils have a right to access that provision which the school are to provide. The Welsh Medium Model of delivery varies between LA's, with bi-lingual schools, Welsh medium, and English medium, however there is that expectation within the skills and cross responsibility skills with Y Gymraeg.
Could translanguaging be explained. Do Welsh Language pupils have to participate in the translanguaging but not for the non-Welsh speakers.	An element within the Curriculum for Wales is cross curricular skills, an element for Welsh and English dependent on the delivery of language of particular settings. The aim of translanguaging element within the new literacy framework is to support learners to become not just bilingual but trilingual and build on the learning across the languages for learners to understand the connections between different languages as they progress through their education.

5. SECONDARY SCHOOLS IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY - CONTINUATION

Points raised by the Panel:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members.
Concern raised of pressure on Head Teachers and staff of the Improvement Strategy and the Curriculum for Wales, what support had been input to ensure school staff were not overwhelmed.	The Schools Service are acutely aware of all challenges and pressures faced by Head Teachers and staff. There was continued close collaboration to build our model for school improvement and support throughout the school calendar. The Service has purposefully planned professional learning or meetings with Head teachers to assist with managing pressures and dealing with issues that have affected their work, holding face to face meetings to allow for effective networking.
Chair made comment made that improving standards for literacy and numeracy appeared to come after self-	The priorities are not in any particular order; however, it would prove difficult to make improvements without precise

<p>evaluation was this correct.</p>	<p>evaluation for areas on which to focus. Following COVID it was noted that there has been a regression in skills. Self-evaluation evidence would be used throughout this year to drive improvement in teaching and learning.</p>
<p>Committee member was very supportive of the ongoing progression Bro Caereinion to provide bi-lingual education for all. There is precedent in Flintshire and Wrexham of one school moving to Welsh Medium and others school in those counties becoming more anglicised. In regard to north Powys, it could take an 1-2 hours on school transport to travel to Bro Caereinion to access a Welsh medium education provision, which is not feasible. This provision does not solve the issue for the rest of the County. Llanfyllin is part of the WESP for Powys, how would the immersion be developed and what support would be available from and around the County.</p>	<p>We have spoken about Trochi and those elements regarding immersion previously and during the discussions in relation to the Bro Caereinion proposal. As a County that provision is provided as and when approached and this will be continued. In the interest of transparency, a WESP (Welsh in Education Strategic Plan) presentation will be provided to Scrutiny prior to Christmas, to update on the various strands.</p>
<p>Would there be plans to create an immersion stream within Llanfyllin and / or Llanidloes to increase the number of bi-lingual children by Yr. 9 through offering an all-inclusive curriculum. Chair confirmed this discussion would be picked up within later scheduled meetings on the WESP.</p>	<p>It is important that discussions are held in relation to the progression of TROCHI, 3 years ago Powys had nothing in place. Parents from the first TROCHI cohort would be willing to attend Scrutiny in the future to inform of their families experience. In term of the TROCHI provision at present and the capacity within the Service TROCHI is successful and has enhanced numbers in Welsh medium. There is a need for further discussion on development and capacity using the evidence and data collected.</p>

6.	WORK PROGRAMME
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Schools transformation updates have been noted within the Work Programme through discussions with Service and Chair.

7. PROGRESS ON SCHOOL BALANCES AUTUMN 2023

Points raised by the Panel:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members.
<p>The position of Secondary schools following intervention of the Finance Team has worsened, were the budgets overly optimistic, were there also concerns for the non-monitored schools. Figures within the report stated for end of 2023/24 almost £500k, £3.346m compared to £3.65m, with the Primary School sector having improved their position by £130k.</p>	<p>Tables 1 and 2 within the report shows schools there were requested to submit recovery plans or were unlicensed at the start of the year following their submittals. In terms of Secondary provision there was reported an improved position from May 2023. By end 2026/27 would be looking at a £7.4m cumulative deficit. In Table 2 that position has improved to £6.5m cumulative deficit.</p> <p>The Finance Team continue to work with schools on budgets.</p>
<p>Chair noted the concern was that figures for 2023/24 had deteriorated between May and September where Finance had been assisting and Committee would have expected to have seen an improvement.</p>	<p>The Finance Service received submittals in May, after which further work was undertaken on budget individual school positions, providing challenge and review to achieve a balanced position at the very least.</p>
<p>There are no in-year balances reported within the tables, the situations has progressively worsened and projected to continue for the next 4 years. The liability on the Council increases year on year, would this indicate there were insufficient budgets delivered to schools.</p>	<p>Not reported within the reports, there were secondary schools indicating surplus in year (2023/24) positions projected. The finance teams are focussing on future years to ensure those balanced positions are achieved.</p> <p>The information within the reports showed a collective position, in the confidential session there will be discussion on specific schools. The Service has worked with 4 schools on deep dives to identify actual and potential savings, with work progressing with another 2 this week. Where themes have been identified the Finance team have taken to the Service and Area Heads meetings to discuss different elements of spend and appropriate spend.</p> <p>There was also the challenge of recruiting Business Managers across Powys which would be a crucial position in supporting Head Teachers to manage budgets and finances. The Service has reviewed the Secondary Funding Formula, with proposals made to mirror other LA's</p>

	<p>i.e. giving more of the ALN funding directly to schools rather than hold in a central budget as well as ALN and deprivation.</p>
<p>With the proposed changes would there be significant in year surpluses impacting on the projected £5m deficit.</p>	<p>In depth reviews have led to extensions in respect of recovery plans, with another school requested to review budget as not in a balanced in year position and commence addressing the deficit. Further meetings with schools have been pencilled in for the coming weeks. The Service has also requested School look passed the 2024/25 financial year and submit plans for year 2025/26 in the New Year to address issues as early as possible.</p>
<p>Scrutiny warned at the last budget that underfunding of the Schools Delegated Budget, would lead to schools using reserves. Cabinet should be almost setting the schools budget for the quantum of funds into the Delegated Budget for 2024/25, what has the Schools Service requested from Cabinet to enable schools to deliver education to the children and young people of Powys, without increasing the deficit liability.</p>	<p>The Portfolio Holder stated that Cabinet would definitely be looking at passporting through all funding that comes to Education over and above already received from WG into the budget, whilst remaining aware of the teachers' pay award which was not funded in England. The draft budget from WG is not due until the week prior to Christmas, therefore unable to state categorically what funding will be covered or if schools would be in receipt of additional funding.</p> <p>The Schools Service identified that Cover Supervisor positions would benefit schools in reducing the supply teacher costs which was built into the funding formula.</p>
	<p>Finance Portfolio Holder thanked the Schools Service Officers for their work collaborating with Governing Bodies and Head Teachers in an extremely challenging financial situation. Despite the information there was some good points within the report.</p> <p>In terms of the £3.3m underspend that has purported to have occurred at budget setting last year, it was made perfectly clear that all allocated monies for Education was passported over. Any further funding would have had to be taken from other services areas or through an increase to Council Tax or Members could put forward ideas, we</p>

	cannot underestimate the impact of inflation on schools who are still working to factor this in and manage budgets accordingly. In 2019 12 warning notice had been issues, in 2023/24 this is 5, which shows significant progress has been made. Pressures within schools will remain for some time yet given the projected inflation rate pressures and an indicative settlement figure of 3.1% from WG.
How many Business Manager vacancies within Powys Schools.	There are 3 vacancies currently, there are also new appointees in place who are undertaking training, there is a significant amount of work input by officers in schools that do not have a Business Manager currently
What was the percentage of the Delegated budget allocated to staffing costs, as would leave little room for manoeuvre within the budget for school.	This has been consistently around 80% in totality and will advise of actual percentage for 2023/24.

8.	EXEMPT ITEM
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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.

9.	SCHOOL BUDGETS REPORTS
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Committee received an update from the Portfolio Holder and Officers on the Schools Budgets

**County Councillor Lucy Roberts
Interim Chair**

