

**Minutes of the Meeting of Learning Communities Overview and Scrutiny
Committee held at the Council Chamber, Penmorfa, Aberaeron and remotely
on Thursday, 8 December 2022**

Present: Councillor Endaf Edwards (Chair), Councillors Chris James (Vice-Chair), Euros Davies, Marc Davies, Meirion Davies, Rhodri Davies, Eryl Evans, Paul Hinge, Gareth Lloyd and Ann Bowen Morgan.

Also in attendance: Cathryn Charnell-White (Co-opted member), Councillors Ceris Jones, Elaine Evans, Keith Evans, Sian Maehrlein, John Roberts and Carl Worrall.

Cabinet Members present: Councillors Catrin M S. Davies, Clive Davies and Wyn Thomas.

Officers in attendance: Meinir Ebbsworth, Corporate Lead Officer: Schools and Culture; Elen James, Corporate Lead Officer: Porth Cymorth Cynnar; Gillian Evans, Corporate Manager: ALN Inclusion & Wellbeing; Angharad Behnan, Principal Educational Psychologist; Gareth Lewis, Deprivation and Rural Challenges Co-ordinator; Lowri Evans, Team Manager; Lisa Evans, Scrutiny and Standards Officer and Neris Morgans, Democratic Services Officer.

(10.00am- 12.47pm)

1 Apologies

- i. Councillors Amanda Edwards, Geraint Wyn Hughes and Mark Strong apologised for their inability to attend the meeting.
- ii. Councillors Euros Davies, Meirion Davies and Ceris Jones apologised that they would be late in joining the meeting.
- iii. Councillor Gareth Lloyd apologised that he would be leaving the meeting early.

**2 Disclosures of personal interest (including whipping declarations)
Members are reminded of their personal responsibility to declare any personal and prejudicial interest in respect of matters contained in this agenda in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, the Council's Constitution and the Members Code of Conduct. In addition, Members must declare any prohibited party whip which the Member has been given in relation to the meeting as per the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011**

Lisa Evans, Scrutiny and Standards Officer declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the issue in relation to school transport raised under the Forward Work Programme.

3 The current referral pathway to a diagnosis of autism

It was explained that members of the Healthier Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been invited to attend and contribute to the discussion for the item under consideration.

Councillor Wyn Thomas, Cabinet Member for Schools, Lifelong Learning and Skills explained that the purpose of the report was to provide information on the current pathway to a diagnosis of autism, the challenges and how the

Schools Services was meeting the needs of children and young people who have or were awaiting a diagnosis. It was highlighted that autism was a lifelong condition and symptoms differed from one person to another.

Angharad Behnan, Principal Educational Psychologist provided a presentation to members outlining the following:

- Background
- Change
- Current situation
- Impact on children and young people in Ceredigion schools
- Support for schools
- Wider local authority support for families, children and young people
- Next steps

Members asked many questions relating to their area of interest which were answered in turn by Officers. The main points raised were as follows:

- It was emphasised that a diagnosis of autism did not affect children and young people's educational provision in Ceredigion, and rather, support was put in place immediately if any symptoms of autism were identified.
- SCAT team meet every 6 weeks to discuss referrals; health leads the work as they are the only body able to provide a diagnosis of autism. A cautious approach was key to ensuring the correct diagnosis was given to each child and young person.
- Referrals should be undertaken by a GP or School Nurse.
- 70% of Ceredigion's schools have Autism Awareness Certificates and Champions (list to be shared with members in due course).
- Concerns were raised with the NHS's long waiting lists; members were encouraged to raise this at any given opportunity. It was noted that Welsh Government (WG) had recently undertaken a Capacity Review where it was identified that health boards nationally were struggling with assessments and so, there had been a pledge for additional funding.
- The importance of inclusivity was raised to ensure each child and young person had an equal opportunity to access mainstream education in the first instance. If not suitable, specialists' units were located on some school campuses and the proximity enabled children and young people to access mainstream lessons where necessary.

Following questions from the floor, it was AGREED to note the following:

1. To be informed on the current referral pathway to a diagnosis of autism in Ceredigion.
2. To be informed on how the Schools Services is meeting the needs of children who have or who are waiting for a diagnosis.

4 Deprivation and Equity Strategy

Councillor Wyn Thomas, Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Schools, Lifelong Learning and Skill explained that since the Covid-19 pandemic, the gap in attainment and opportunity between disadvantaged and more privileged learners has widened. Outcomes at GCSE suggest the deprivation gap in education in Wales is currently around 24 months' worth of academic progress. The cost-of-living crisis is only serving to widen any pre-existing

attainment and opportunity gap found within education. It was highlighted that the Minister for Education and Welsh Language, Jeremy Miles, has spoken regularly about his commitment to supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. An overview of the current situation as noted in the report was provided.

Gareth Lewis, Deprivation and Rural Challenges Co-ordinator provided a presentation to members outlining the following:

1. Background
2. Comments by Jeremy Miles, Minister for Education and Welsh Language
3. Purpose of the Strategy
4. Content of the Strategy
5. Opportunities for reflection
6. What impact are we hoping for?
7. Next steps

Members asked many questions relating to their area of interest which were answered in turn by Officers. The main points raised were as follows:

- Concerns were raised that although the Minister for Education and Welsh Language was supportive of schools, there continued to be budget cuts. The £8 million in school reserves would reduce significantly with the increase in school wages and energy costs. Officers have already raised concerns with WG.
- It was highlighted that all children and young people should have an equal opportunity to succeed in school. The strategy included many practical points to support families from disadvantaged backgrounds, although it was acknowledged that funding was a factor.
- School attendance was deemed very important for many reasons. Following work from the department, primary school attendance has improved, with some work needed again on secondary school attendance.
- No child or young person should be cold in the classroom. If this was the case, members were requested to send evidence to the department.
- To prepare young people for work experience and for later in life, a pilot scheme has been undertaken in Cardigan where the school worked closely with the community and businesses locally. In addition, the new curriculum allowed schools to teach life skills to support young people with independence whilst Seren, a WG initiative supported young people with aspirations to reach their full academic potential.

Following questions from the floor, it was AGREED to:

1. adopt the contents of the Ceredigion strategy for schools on Deprivation and Equity.
2. an annual report on progress against the Ceredigion Deprivation and Equity Strategy be presented to the Schools, and the Learning Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

5 Ceredigion Youth Council Meeting Minutes (21.10.22)

Consideration was given to the Ceredigion Youth Council Meeting Minutes. One of the duties bestowed on Local Authorities within the Welsh Government - Shared Purpose: Shared Future: Statutory Guidance to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015- is Annex B - the Statutory Guidance On Children And Young People's Participation. The background and current situation as noted in the report was provided. Representatives from all of Ceredigion's secondary schools, Coleg Ceredigion, Aberystwyth University as well as various Youth Groups are part of Ceredigion Youth Council this year, along with local authority officers and two Cabinet Members, whom are also invited to attend the meetings.

It was noted that Poppy Evans had recently finished her term as member of Youth Parliament for Ceredigion in the United Kingdom Youth Parliament and as a result, Aled Lewis has been elected to represent Ceredigion for 2022-23. Lloyd Warburton continues as Member of Youth Parliament-Senedd Cymru. A new Youth Council Chairperson would be elected at the next meeting arranged for 03.02.23. The importance of ensuring that the views of young people were fed into the democratic process in Ceredigion was deemed very important.

Following questions from the floor, it was AGREED that Ceredigion Youth Council minutes were presented to both the Learning Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet, for information, each term.

6 A verbal update on the grants available to schools

Meinir Ebbsworth, Corporate Lead Officer: Schools & Culture explained that as the local authority settlement was not due until 13.12.22, no information on grants for schools in 2023-24 was yet available. In terms of 2022-23, many grants had been available to schools as outlined below:

1. Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) worth £1.6 million to support free school meals pupils with education and well-being- 98% delegated to schools and 2% held centrally to support LAC
2. Education Improvement Grant (EIG) worth £2.6 million- 96% delegated to schools and 4% held centrally to support funded non-maintained nursery settings
3. Professional Teaching Grant worth £260,000- 100% delegated to schools to support with staffing costs associated with the new curriculum
4. Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards: Accelerating Learning Programme grant (RRRS grant) worth £1.4 million- 100% delegated to schools

Where possible, grants have been delegated to schools to ensure they receive the maximum benefit. The RRRS Grant, related to Covid-19, will reduce as time goes by, however, details on grants for 2023-24 will not be available until a few months after the settlement has been announced. Overall, schools would rather receive support with core funding as opposed to grants.

It was noted that schools have received maintenance grants through the years to improve buildings. All schools have an agreement booklet which

sets out clearly what the school and the authority have responsibility for. In addition, the authority has a maintenance programme in place based on the survey undertaken by Faithful+Gould, with emergency work given priority. Members were advised to contact the education department if they felt emergency maintenance work was required in a school but had not been included in the programme. It was highlighted that there were difficulties attracting businesses to tender for work, however, if grants had not been used by the end of the financial year, other arrangements were in place.

It was reported that no funding for Band C of the 21st Century Schools and Colleges programme would be available. The authority was required to present information in 18 months of the need for any extensions, significant work beyond the authority's Capital programme or new schools for the next 5 years to WG.

Following questions from the floor, it was AGREED to note the current position.

7 To confirm minutes of the previous meeting and to consider any matters arising from those Minutes

It was AGREED to confirm as a true record the Minutes of the previous meeting of the committee.

Matters arising: None.

8 To consider the draft Forward Work Programme

It was AGREED to note the draft Forward Work Programme as presented subject to the following:

- An update on the number of pupils receiving Welsh-medium education
- Report on encouraging the use of Welsh in schools
- It was noted that the local authority had a legal duty to provide school transport to the closest school as per School Transport Policy, previously presented to members at a workshop. If pupils decide to attend another school, parents had a responsibility to arrange transport
- Report on the number of children receiving home education since Covid-19

9 Any other business

Councillor Wyn Thomas thanked all officers for their work and that the support provided to schools was very much appreciated.

Confirmed at the Meeting of the Learning Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9 February 2023

Chairman: _____

Date: _____