

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Learning Communities Overview and Scrutiny
Committee held at the Council Chamber, Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion,
Penmorfa, Aberaeron and remotely on Thursday, 6 July 2023**

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

Also in attendance: Rhodri Evans, Jonny Greatrex (Co-opted Member) and Cathryn Charnell-White (Co-opted Member).

Cabinet Members present: Councillor Wyn Thomas.

Officers in attendance: Barry Rees, Corporate Director; Elen James, Corporate Lead Officer- Lifelong Learning; Clive Williams, Corporate Lead Officer- Schools; Carys Davies, Childcare Strategic Manager, Gwion Dafydd, Corporate Manager- Accountability and Progress, Llifon Ellis, e-sgol Head of Strategy, Lisa Evans, Scrutiny and Standards Officer and Neris Morgans, Democratic Services Officer.

(10.00am- 12.39pm)

1 Apologies

- i. Councillor Marc Davies apologised for his inability to attend the meeting.
- ii. Councillor Elizabeth Evans apologised for having to leave 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**

There were no disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests (including whipping declarations) from Committee Members.

3 Personal Matters

- i. Councillor Wyn Thomas congratulated all involved with the Talwrn y Beirdd competition arranged for the local authority's secondary schools held recently during Gŵyl Fawr Aberteifi.
- ii. Councillor Wyn Thomas congratulated Ysgol Llanfihangel-y-Creuddyn who celebrated 185 years this year.
- iii. Councillor Wyn Thomas congratulated Kay Morris and Eryl Jones for organising a successful robotics workshop for over 300 pupils recently.
- iv. Councillor Ann Bowen Morgan noted there was a Language Fair in Lampeter on 8 July at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

4 Verbal update on the GCSE reform (Made-for-Wales GCSEs)

Barry Rees, Corporate Director thanked the Committee for the opportunity to address the matter under consideration. An overview was provided of the

changes proposed following a public consultation held between October and December 2022 on the reform of GCSEs by Qualifications Wales, an independent statutory body funded by the Welsh Government (WG). The final decision would be done by WG whilst the examination board WJEC would implement the changes.

The outcomes of the consultation had very recently been published hence the verbal update as opposed to a written report. Several concerns could be drawn from the outcomes, including combining Biology, Chemistry and Physics to GCSE The Sciences (Double Award), which would result in the abolishment of separate science GCSEs (Triple Award) offered by 80% of schools throughout Wales.

Evidence from the Consultation's outcomes suggested that the consensus of 456 respondents had been disregarded, as reflected in the findings below:

- Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal for GCSE The Sciences (Double Award)? Overall, 13% agreed with the proposal for GCSE The Sciences (Double Award), whilst 78% disagreed.
- To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal for GCSE The Sciences (Double Award) meets the reasonable needs of learners in Wales? Overall, 12% agreed that the proposal for GCSE The Sciences (Double Award) meets the needs of learners in Wales, whilst 75% disagreed.

Despite clear responses, Qualifications Wales had announced that GCSE The Sciences (Double Award) would be developed, replacing separate science GCSEs. This decision could lead to challenges for pupils who wished to follow traditional routes, such as studying medicine or veterinary science at university and for apprenticeships. As outlined by the local authority's Corporate Strategy, one objective was to boost the economy, support businesses and enable employment, therefore, strong scientific skills were key for ventures such as AberInnovation and Food Centre Wales available locally. Barry Rees explained that information had been shared about the proposals with the Political Group leaders, the Chair of the Committee and the relevant Cabinet Member.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions to Barry Rees. The main points raised were as follows:

- The higher education sector was involved in the consultation and confirmed that the pathway from GCSE The Sciences (Double Award) to A Level and onto higher education was legitimate. Despite this, concerns were raised by Officers and Members that it would create a more difficult pathway for pupils compared to pupils in England who would have the benefit of studying separate science GCSEs and would retain the linear pathway.
- Concerns were raised that the changes that would possibly be introduced from September 2025 onwards were a significant step back and would prevent pupils from specialising in subjects.

- It was suggested that the changes may be due to the lack of teachers, however, this solution would create another problem.
- Changes to other subjects were also being proposed; a report would be presented at a later meeting.
- The rationale for the changes was questioned. It was noted that there was an ambition for pupils to have a balanced education. In addition, it would allow some time in the Curriculum for pupils to study other subjects including the Welsh Baccalaureate. A combination of traditional/academic and vocational subjects was deemed important but removing the choice from pupils was concerning.
- The next step for Qualifications Wales was to present the proposals formally to WG for decision. During this period, there were opportunities to voice opinions on the changes to the decision-makers, and to two key figures (the Chief Executive of Qualifications Wales and Jeremy Miles MS, Minister for Education and Welsh Language).
- Members expressed concerns about whether the changes would have an impact on university applications. Qualifications Wales alleged that GCSE The Sciences (Double Award) would be sufficient as the entrance points were based on A-Level grades. Courses such as medicine were already difficult to access given the high grades required, and as a result, foundation courses had been established. This created a long pathway for pupils to reach their goals, however, the changes proposed would make it more challenging again.

Following recommendations from the Committee Members, it was agreed for Barry Rees, Corporate Director to draft a letter to be sent to the Chief Executive of Qualifications Wales, Welsh Government and Jeremy Miles MS, Minister for Education and Welsh Language to express deep-seated concerns, focusing on three principles: removing the choice from pupils, disregarding the views of respondents and the impact on pupils' educational pathway. It was agreed that the letter would be shared with the Committee and submitted in their name.

5 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) 2022-2027 - Year 1 Progress Report (2022-2023)

Councillor Wyn Thomas (Cabinet Member for Schools, Lifelong Learning and Skills) presented the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) 2022-2027 – Year 1 Progress Report (2022-2023). An overview of the following as outlined in the report was provided:

- Background
- Current situation
- Concerns
- Actions to address gaps
- Sustaining/enhancing provision (population - live births, childcare places, child poverty, Flying Start Outreach)
- Welsh Language (Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (Wesp))

Carys Davies shared a short video of the work carried out at different childcare establishments throughout the county following successful grant applications made by the providers.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions which were answered by Officers present. The main points raised were as follows:

- Flying Start had worked closely with a private provider in Lampeter to explore options to expand their provision, but they had decided against this. Due to the need for further provision in the area, options were being explored including locating a suitable venue.
- It was noted that the Council should work with planning applications for childcare as there was a lack of provision in the county.
- Capital grant funding has benefitted the sector to develop the environment of the setting, but the real need is for revenue funding to support staff wages. This has been raised with WG.
- WG's focus at present was to expand the Flying Start provision for 2-year-olds in Ceredigion. WG had approved additional Flying Start areas in March 2023 and work was ongoing to implement the Flying Start childcare element on a phased basis.
- Ceredigion has been identified as one of five LAs in Wales to work with HMRC and Hempsall's in the coming year to support an increase in take-up of Tax-Free Childcare. The financial support could support working parents with the costs of childcare for 0–12-year-olds. Hopefully, by raising awareness, it would lead to an increase in the take-up by families.
- Members highlighted that 'Y Dyfodol', previously a private nursery in Cellan was vacant. It was reported that the local authority had no funding to secure the provision and the small amount per head from Flying Start only funded childcare provision. In addition, Flying Start's terms were specific and depended on the postcode of the child's address and whether it was within a Lower Super Output Area (LSOA).

Following a proposal by Members, Committee Members agreed to recommend that the Cabinet/ Leadership Group explore options related to 'Y Dyfodol' in Cellan, given the need for childcare provision in the area.

In addition, Committee Members agreed to note the progress made in implementing the current action plan and the issues facing the Local Authorities in meeting their duty of securing sufficiency of childcare.

6 Overview of e-sgol

Councillor Wyn Thomas explained that the e-sgol project had been running since September 2018, with the original intention of supporting schools by providing lessons via e-sgol to pupils post 16 which would not have been available without this provision. The project was funded by WG, and Ceredigion was responsible for coordinating the project nationally. Following trialling the project in Ceredigion, it was moved on to Powys and GWE, where the positive effect of e-sgol was now going from strength to strength. The team had increased to include a Headteacher, 3 Secondary School leaders and one Primary School leader to commence in the near future. The project had also absorbed some of the work of the "Ymlaen a'r Dysgu" project which supports Welsh speakers post-16 within the English medium schools who wished to carry on developing their skills in the sixth form. In January 2021 e-sgol was commissioned by WG to develop a series of live revision sessions for students sitting their GCSEs, AS and A Levels (Carlam

Cymru). They were also recorded so that students could revisit them at any time. The sessions aimed to enrich the information of the students in different subjects and to offer further assistance to the exceptional work the teachers undertake in their schools. These live revision sessions were free and were available to all students across Wales and beyond.

Since the Pandemic remote learning has become very familiar to all pupils in Wales and the leaders of e-sgol have been progressive in offering support and training to schools in this area. Other successful elements that have been launched recently by the e-sgol team are working with Mudiad Meithrin across Wales; and the scheme of linking Pupil Referral Units with nearby schools as a means of providing GCSE courses to vulnerable pupils whilst training mainstream teachers on the specific teaching techniques.

Llifon Ellis provided a presentation to the Committee outlining the following:

- e-sgol team structure
- What is e-sgol?
- In the pipeline
- Recent projects
- Hybrid learning models and how it works
- Pupil and teacher setup
- Pupil voice
- Training and support

Members thanked Llifon Ellis for providing an informative presentation and that it was great to hear that Ceredigion was leading the work.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions which were answered by Officers present. The main points raised were as follows:

- In response to concerns raised related to digital connectivity, it was noted that there had been no issues at educational institutions as the infrastructure in place was generally good.
- Discussions about who provided courses were held between schools within the cluster. Funding for the provision varied from authority to authority, but in Ceredigion, there was a funding model in place between schools to support this.
- Generally, learners studied one e-sgol course at a time and accessed other courses face-to-face.

Following questions by the Committee Members, it was agreed to note the report.

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

It was agreed to confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 08 June 2023.

Matters arising: None.

8 To consider the draft Forward Work Programme

It was agreed to note the contents of the Forward Work Programme presented subject to the following:

- 2023 GCSE & A Levels results (September 2023)
- Post-16 education (September 2023)
- GCSEs Reform (September 2023)
- Feedback on Individual Development Plan (November 2023/ May 2024)

Following a proposal, Democratic Services were asked to conduct enquiries around whether there were hybrid facilities in place at Cwrtnewydd School to hold November's meeting. If this was not possible, a visit to see the work undertaken at the school would be arranged as part of the workstream, which would be looked at by Officers in September.

9 Any other business

- i. Councillor Wyn Thomas noted that the Junior Proms Concert would be held on 6 July 2023 and the Senior Proms Concert would be held on 11 July 2023. Ceredigion Music Service were thanked for their work.
- ii. Councillor Wyn Thomas explained that work had commenced at the site of the new Aeron Valley area school. Progress updates would be provided to the Committee in due course.
- iii. Members noted that there continued to be difficulties with the hybrid system, which led to missing parts of the discussion. It was noted that ICT Officers had been informed of the issues during the meeting.

Confirmed at the Meeting of the Learning Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 28 September 2023

Chairman: _____

Date: _____