

Scrutiny observations on Schools Policy

Scrutiny Committee B considered the draft Schools Policy at their meeting on the 26th January 2018. Their observations by way of an extract from the minutes of that meeting are attached at Appendix A.

The Scrutiny Group welcome the production of the Schools Policy which provides welcome clarity from the Cabinet regarding their approach in conjunction with Vision 2025. The Schools Policy has been amended in light of the consultation process and some of the observations made by scrutiny have been addressed. However, some concerns remain and in addition other concerns have been raised in the WAO Annual Audit letter. Scrutiny therefore seek assurance from Cabinet that they are content the Policy is sufficiently clear to address these issue:

1 Regulatory concerns:

At Audit Committee on 20th February 2018 the Annual Audit Letter 2016-17 (dated 25th January 2018 was received which included reference to the use of resources:

reported the need for the Council to increase the pace and scale of change in implementing its 'Schools Organisation Policy, Planning Education Provision', in order to achieve an affordable and sustainable education service.

This came from the Annual Improvement Report 2016-17 which included reference to the Review of Education and Finance June 2017 where the following recommendation was made:

In order to achieve an affordable and adequately resourced school system, the Council should increase the pace and scale of change in implementing its Schools Organisation Policy, Planning Education Provision. In particular, the Council should work with partners inside and outside Wales to ensure that learners aged 16 to 19 are able to access a suitable curriculum in the language of their choice.

Scrutiny seek assurance that Cabinet have been mindful of these Auditor recommendations when preparing the policy.

2. Post 16 provision:

The proposals within the Delivery Plan are noted. This needs to proceed at pace as noted by the WAO report. Scrutiny understand that the number of pupils accessing Post 16 provision has dropped by approximately 100 over the last 5 years. These pupils are choosing to access quality provision outside of Powys and the Schools Policy gives an opportunity to refresh what is on offer to pupils within Powys. It is disappointing that it is only intended to implement a new model from September 2019 which the 2018 cohort will not be able to access. The decline in pupils accessing Post 16 in Powys has been known for some years and assurance is sought that this is addressed at pace and within the timescales set out in the Plan.

3. Governance

The governance of this programme remains unclear. A Delivery Plan has been put together for agreement at Cabinet with monitoring at a Steering Group who may consider and include other potential projects. Clarity around the Steering Group's role, terms of reference and reporting mechanisms to Cabinet is lacking within the report and further detail is sought regarding the public oversight and accountability of decisions regarding School Organisation.

APPENDIX A

Extract from minutes of Scrutiny Committee B 26th January 2018

The Schools Manager Schools Transformation introduced the Draft Schools Policy which is out for consultation (copy filed with signed minutes).

The Portfolio Holder and Director of Education provided additional detail in response to questions and it is the view of scrutiny that it should not be necessary to question the Portfolio Holder and Director of Education to gain an understanding of the Policy. The Policy should contain sufficient detail to be standalone.

The following observations are made:

- The Policy outlines high level aspirations and is short on the level of detail which would be expected in such a policy as to how these will be achieved. It needs to be motivational.
- There is particular lack of detail regarding the financial sustainability of schools and reference needs to be made to the Formula Funding review
- In respect of alternative models of delivery these will need to be based on sound educational principles and research and consideration should be given to referencing this in Section 3 paragraph 4 of the Policy
- Section 5 rightly includes leadership as a key consideration with appropriate aspirations. Consideration should be given to including a similar section on teaching and aspirations relating thereto
- Post 16 provision needs additional detail regarding the current work which is being undertaken with providers. The document acknowledges that schools are challenged by increased competition from out of county providers and notes that joint working will be undertaken to provide a curriculum that meets the needs of learners. This will have to be considerably more attractive than at present. Learners are demonstrating that they are prepared to travel considerable distances and spend a considerable amount of time to access excellent provision on single sites, something the collaborative curriculum within Powys has demonstrably not been able to compete with. There is an urgent need to progress this part of the Policy.
- There is a lack of reference to the role of Governors in supporting the aims of the authority expressed within this policy. Governors will need training and support to fulfil their role.
- There is a lack of reference to early years which are intimately linked to school provision and should be referenced
- The opportunities offered by e-learning should be included with an acknowledgment of what can be delivered using the current infrastructure and what would be needed to fully access the opportunities offered by this technology
- With regard to Governance if the Learning and Skills Programme Board are monitoring progress on the Work Programme they should also be involved in the setting of the Work Programme