

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Pwyllgor Craffu Plant a Phobl Ifanc held at Remote Meeting on Dydd Iau, 11eg Chwefror, 2021 at 2.00 pm

Councillors Present

County Councillor T. Thomas (Chairman)
County Councillor L. Brown (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: L.Dymock, M.Groucutt and M. Powell

Officers in Attendance

Sharon Randall-Smith, Pennaeth Cyflawniad a Chyrhaeddiad
Hazel Ilett, Rheolwyr Craffu
Robert McGowan, Swyddog Polisi a Chraffu

APOLOGIES: County Councillors M.Lane and J.Watkins

1. Datganiadau o Fuddiant

Cytunodd y pwyllgor i gofnodi unrhyw ddatganiadau buddiant fel a phryd yn briodol wrth drafod yr adroddiadau.

2. Ymgynghori ar Gynllun Busnes Gwasanaeth Cyflawni Addysg (CGA) ar gyfer 2021/2022 cyn cytundeb y Cabinet ym mis Ebrill 2021 (adroddiad i ddilyn).

Cyflwynodd Ed Pryce a Darren Jones o EAS yr eitem drwy esbonio fod EAS yn cyflwyno ystod eang o wasanaethau gwella ysgolion i bob ysgol yn yr awdurdodau lleol sy'n ffurfio rhan o'r consortia. Esboniodd Ed y byddai'n canolbwyntio ar elfennau allweddol yr adroddiad cyn y byddai Darren yn ateb cwestiynau penodol am ysgolion Sir Fynwy. Mae'r adroddiad yn dod i'r pwyllgor i roi cyfle i aelodau gyflwyno sylwadau ar gynnwys y cynllun busnes lleol a, thrwy wneud hynny, i ystyried y cryfderau a'r meysydd ar gyfer gwella yn ysgolion Sir Fynwy.

Dywedodd Ed y cafodd y cynllun busnes ei ysgrifennu yng nghyd-destun y sefyllfa newidiol gyda phandemig COVID-19 ac i ba raddau y gallwn ragweld y dyfodol ar gyfer y 12 mis nesaf. Mae EAS wedi trafod y prif flaenoriaethau ar gyfer y rhanbarth gyda uwch arweinwyr mewn ysgolion ac mae ffocws y 12 mis nesaf ar obaith ac optimistaeth ac esblygu ac addasu dysgu yn ystod cyfnod adferiad COVID-19. Cadarnhaodd Ed y byddai EAS yn sensitif i anghenion gweithlu'r ysgol ac yn gefnogol ac ymatebol fel sefydliad. Er y byddai cymorth yn gydnaws gyda disgwyliadau awdurdodau lleol a Llywodraeth Cymru, mae EAS yn ystyried ymchwil sy'n dod i'r amlwg ar ddysgu cyfunol. Byddai'r EAS hefyd yn ceisio osgoi biwrocratiaeth diangen ar gyfer ysgolion. Cadarnhaodd EAS bod y gwerthusiadau canol blwyddyn a adroddir i grwpiau llywodraethiant EAS ar gael i'w gweld. Clywodd Aelodau y byddai 'Cynnig Dysgu Proffesiynol' ar gael i bob ysgol i ateb anghenion datblygu wrth i'r pandemig dynnu at ei derfyn ac os yw'r grant yn caniatáu, caiff pob ysgol ei hariannu i gyflwyno cyfran fawr o'r gweithgaredd dysgu proffesiynol. Byddai ysgolion hefyd yn manteisio o becynnau

cymorth pwrpasol sy'n diwallu'r blaenoriaethau a ddynodwyd yn eu Cynlluniau Datblygu Lleol ac y byddai hyblygrwydd i ganiatáu newidiadau mewn amgylchiadau yng ngoleuni'r pandemig. Cadarnhaodd fod model canoledig EAS wedi ei alluogi i sicrhau arbedion ac arbedion maint ac wedi galluogi datblygu arbenigedd lefel uchel ar draws y rhanbarth.

Byddai EAS yn parhau i weithio mewn partneriaeth gyda chynghorau i drin eu hargymhellion i Estyn a'u blaenoriaethau strategol. Blaenoriaethau strategol Sir Fynwy yw gwella deilliannau ar gyfer rhai o'n dysgwyr mwyaf bregus, cynyddu nifer y disgyblion sy'n cael safonau rhagorol, manylu strategaeth glir ar gyfer anghenion addysgol arbennig a chryfhau defnyddio tystiolaeth hunanarfarnu i fod yn sylfaen i gynllunio gwella. Rhai o'r blaenoriaethau allweddol ar gyfer EAS fyddai darparu cefnogaeth llesiant i ymarferwyr a dysgwyr, darparu cefnogaeth bwrpasol i ysgolion, gwella ansawdd addysgu a dysgu (yn cynnwys dysgu cyfunol) a chefnogi grwpiau penodol o ddysgwyr difreintiedig a bregus, yn cynnwys y rhai yr mae cau ysgolion yn effeithio'n anghymesur arnynt. Blaenoriaethau eraill fyddai helpu ysgolion i wireddu Cwricwlwm Cymru i sicrhau mynediad i amrywiaeth o ddysgu proffesiynol rhanbarthol a chenedlaethol, i gynnwys mynediad i fentora a hyfforddi a hyrwyddo rhwydweithiau ymarferwyr rhanbarthol. Byddai'r EAS yn parhau i gefnogi datblygu arweinwyr mewn ysgolion, meithrin gallu cyrff llywodraethu drwy ddysgu proffesiynol a datblygu diwylliant o atebolrwydd sy'n gwerthfawrogi nodweddion ysgolion effeithlon. Byddent hefyd yn ymwreiddio eu model arfarnu mewnol i sicrhau y rhoddir cefnogaeth effeithlon ac effeithiol i bob ysgol a lleoliad. Tynnodd Ed sylw'r aelodau at adrannau uchelgeisiau a risgiau yr adroddiad ac esboniodd fod camau lliniaru yn eu lle. Cyfeiriwyd yn fwy manwl at y goblygiadau adnoddau, gyda Ed yn cynghori Aelodau am gyfraniad ariannol Sir Fynwy a'r ansicrwydd ar hyn o bryd yng nghyswllt y sefyllfa cyllido grant.

Her Aelod:

Diolchodd y Cadeirydd i Ed am ei gyflwyniad cynhwysfawr ar yr adroddiad a diolchodd hefyd i EAS am eu gwasanaethau mewn cyfnod heriol a digynsail. Gwahoddodd gwestiynau gan y pwyllgor, fel sy'n dilyn:

- Mae fy nghwestiwn yn ymwneud â'r gostyngiad mewn cyllid awdurdodau lleol y cyfeirir ato ym mharagraff 5.10. Gan ei bod yn debyg y bydd mwy o alw i gefnogi plant bregus fel canlyniad i'r pandemig, roeddwn yn tybio os y cawsoch lai o arian gan y Cyngor eleni neu os oedd hwn yn ostyngiad oedd wedi'i gynllunio mewn cyllid.

Roedd hwn yn ostyngiad wedi'i gynllunio fel canlyniad i arbedion effeithiolrwydd i bob awdurdod lleol sy'n bartneriaid.

- Mae tystiolaeth yn dod i'r amlwg fod y pandemig wedi effeithio ar ddeilliannau dysgu ar gyfer dysgwyr bregus. Pe byddai athrawon yn gorfod buddsoddi eu hymdrechion i ddatblygu dulliau dysgu ar-lein, a yw gwaith ar symud ymlaen gyda'r Cwricwlwm i Gymru wedi ei oedi ac a oes dadl dros ofyn i Lywodraeth Cymru ohirio ei gyflwyniad?

Gan gydnabod fod hwn yn benderfyniad i Lywodraeth Cymru, gallaf werthfawrogi y gellid gweld hwn fel baich diangen ar hyn o bryd ond gan fod cynifer o'n hysgolion yn paratoi amdano fel proses barhaus, cyhyd â bod ysgolion yn cael hyblygrwydd a

dealltwriaeth i ysgolion wrth ei weithredu, rwy'n ei weld fel cyfle yn hytrach na bygythiad. Yn ystod y pandemig, mae EAS wedi cefnogi ysgolion i weithio tuag at gyflwyno'r cwricwlwm newydd a bydd yn parhau i helpu cefnogi unrhyw fylchoedd.

- A allwch egluro os ydych yn dweud hynny oherwydd y gall fod ysgolion yn llai parod ar gyfer y cwricwlwm newydd nag y byddent wedi bod mewn gwahanol amgylchiadau oherwydd heriau'r 12 mis diwethaf?

Rwy'n credu yn sicr fod heriau wedi bod ac efallai nad yw ysgolion yn teimlo mor barod ag yr hoffent, ond bu hwn yn waith parhaus ac nid wedi ei atal yn llwyr. Mae dysgu proffesiynol yn gymaint mwy hyblyg nawr ac mewn rhai ffyrdd, gall dysgu proffesiynol yng nghyswllt y cwricwlwm newydd fod wedi datblygu ymhellach.

- Yn nhermau'r blaenoriaethau strategol ar gyfer Sir Fynwy a restrir dan baragraff 3.21, ymddengys fod blaenoriaethau strategol Sir Fynwy yn aros yr un fath tra bod dau o'r awdurdodau lleol eraill yn rhestru mai cau'r bwch COVID yw eu blaenoriaeth. A ddylai hyn hefyd fod yn un o'n blaenoriaethau ni, ac ystyried fod plant wedi colli mas ar addysg lawn-amser ac y bydd wedi effeithio'n fwy ar blant bregus? Ymddengys fod rhai o'r blaenoriaethau strategol ar goll ar gyfer rhai o'r cynghorau.

Hefyd, yng nghyswllt y Bil Cwricwlwm ac Asesu, roedd peth o'r adborth yn awgrymu fod pryder y gall fod baich ychwanegol ar athrawon wrth gyflwyno'r cwricwlwm newydd yn ogystal â helpu dysgwyr. Fe wnaethoch chi ddweud fod ysgolion yn paratoi ar gyfer hyn ar sail barhaus, fodd bynnag a ddylid rhoi mwy o ymdrech i helpu plant i ddal lan ar ôl colli addysg lawn-amser mewn amgylchedd ystafell ddosbarth.

EAS ~ Bydd gan bobl eu barn eu hunain ar y cwricwlwm newydd ond mae angen i ni fod yn gydnaws gyda chyfeiriad Llywodraeth Cymru ac mae adborth gan ysgolion yn awgrymu fod rhai ysgolion yn teimlo'n barod ar gyfer hyn. Mae'n anochel fod peth amrywiaeth a byddwn yn gwneud ein gorau glas i gefnogi'r ysgolion hynny. Roedd rhai o flaenoriaethau strategol yr awdurdodau lleol eraill ar goll adeg paratoi'r adroddiad hwn, ond cânt i gyd eu cynnwys yn y fersiwn terfynol.

MCC ~ Mae argymhellion Estyn wedi llywio ein gwaith wrth symud ymlaen. Rydyn ni mewn sefyllfa yn awr lle mae'n rhaid i ni gefnogi ysgolion mewn gwahanol ffyrdd a bu'n rhaid i'n blaenoriaethau newid. Mae ein nodau strategol yn gynhwysfawr ac ar ddechrau'r pandemig y flaenoriaeth oedd galluogi plant gweithwyr allweddol i ddychwelyd i'r ysgol, nad oedd yn dasg rwydd. Yna fe newidodd y flaenoriaeth i gefnogi dysgu o bell fel a drafodwyd yn y seminar i aelodau a gynhaliwyd ychydig wythnosau yn ôl. Yn fwy diweddar, y flaenoriaeth oedd i blant ddychwelyd i'r ysgol yn ddiogel ac rydyn ni wedi llwyddo hyn i wneud hyn i raddau, gan dderbyn fod rhai plant yn dal i ddysgu gartref ar hyn o bryd. Y flaenoriaeth nawr fydd paratoi ein plant ar gyfer pa bynnag olwg fydd ar broses asesu eleni a chefnogi ein hysgolion. Rydym yn adolygu ein nodau strategol yn barhaus yn unol â'r gwaith a wnawn gydag Estyn a byddwn yn adolygu ein blaenoriaethau ar ôl i'r plant ddychwelyd i'r ysgol. Byddwn yn siarad gydag ysgolion i weld os bydd angen ychwanegu blaenoriaeth bellach am gau'r bylchau mewn dysgu fel y gwnaethoch gyfeirio ato. Fodd bynnag, mae'n anodd iawn penderfynu i ba raddau y mae hyn yn broblem a'r camau i fynd i'r afael â hynny nes fod ein myfyrwyr wedi dychwelyd i leoliadau ysgol.

- Nid wyf yn credu y dylem ddiystyru faint o waith sydd angen ei wneud i baratoi ar gyfer y cwricwlwm newydd ac rwy'n bryderus y bydd llawer o heriau i athrawon felly rwy'n meddwl fod angen i ni fod yn ystyriol o hynny.

EAS – Mae angen i ni fod yn effro am sut mae ysgolion yn ymateb i heriau ond byddwn yn parhau i wrando a chefnogi athrawon gystal ag y medrwn.

Hoffwn adleisio a chefnogi pryderon y Cynghorydd Brown yng nghyswllt cau'r bwch ar gyfer dysgwyr bregus.

Casgliad y Cadeirydd:

Hoffwn ddiolch i Ed a Darren o EAS am fod yn bresennol a'u mewnbwn i'r cyfarfod ac am ateb y cwestiynau. I grynhoi, esboniwyd y mater am ostwng cyllid, fodd bynnag pryderon allweddol y Pwyllgor o hyd yw os bydd angen blaenoriaeth strategol newydd i gau'r bwch mewn dysgu ar gyfer pob plentyn ond yn neilltuol blant bregus a all fod wedi dioddef yn anghymesur yn ystod y pandemig.

Mae gennym bryderon am gyflwyno cwricwlwm newydd yn 2022 ond sylweddolwn fod hwn yn fater gwleidyddol y bydd angen i Lywodraeth Cymru ei ystyried ac na all y Pwyllgor Dethol ddylanwadu ar hynny. Mae gennym bryderon am les athrawon a rydym yn hyderus y bydd y Cyngor ac EAS yn gwrandao arnynt ac yn cynnig y gefnogaeth briodol iddynt.

3. Cyflwyniad ar ymgysylltu â Phrydau Ysgol Am Ddim cyn y strategaeth ddrafftio.

Members were advised that this topic had been brought to the select committee to engage the members on the Free School Meals strategy in advance of drafting the strategy. The Head of Achievement and Attainment advised members that they had a draft Free Schools Meals (FSM) Strategy ready to bring to the committee last year, however, a visit from Estyn and the Covid 19 pandemic had brought about new considerations. Estyn had suggested the council may want to consider having a targeted resource for FSM and they identified that the absence of performance information to provide indications on progress posed difficulties in measuring improvement. The Head of Achievement and Attainment explained that this period of reflection had led officers to conclude that what they would have presented to members last year would be very different to they would present today and that this would be very different to what they would be likely to present in the future.

The presentation would provide an overview of the various issues that need to feed into the strategy, some issues having been raised earlier in the meeting, such as how best to help children catch up on their learning and achieve their best. The officer explained that they had begun by considering the definition of poverty and had worked with the 'Tackling Poverty and Inequality Group' to reach a consistent definition, also contributing to the action plan of this group. The definition that has been used is "when a person's resources (mainly their material resources) are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs (including social participation)". She explained that covid 19 has had an impact and will change the picture for poverty in Monmouthshire.

The officer advised that the presentation presented the average picture of poverty across Wales rather than the picture for Monmouthshire specifically, as we are still awaiting local data to provide a useful comparison. She explained that poverty can affect any child at any stage of life and that it may always have been a factor or could be a new factor due to covid. She described some of the impacts on young people which include poorer physical and mental health, poorer achievement and lower life prospects together with other considerations such as whether the child has experienced bullying or problems at home. In terms of child poverty in Monmouthshire overall, whilst the data shows we do not have high levels of deprivation, it doesn't provide the full picture. She explained that Monmouthshire has pockets of high deprivation and the overarching figure does mask the challenges in those areas. The distribution of pupils in receipt of FSM is also not linear across schools, so in some schools there could be several pupils whilst in others, the number may equal a 3rd of the total pupil numbers. Members heard that early intervention for families is critical and that Flying Start works incredibly well to support very young children to have the best possible start in life. The picture for our young people covered by the Flying Start programme is positive in comparison to Wales, so it does indicate that our children are benefitting from a good start in life. The officer highlighted how pupils in receipt of FSM are impacted by hunger and that feedback from young people suggested there is a stigma in relation to receiving FSM and there needs to be thought given to how to address this. Similarly, uniforms were identified as an issue, particularly more expensive items such as blazers and thought needs to be given to the type of uniform so that it can be affordable to all. Also 'participation in the life of the school' has an impact, whereby children may not be able to attend school trips or experiences and simple things like dressing up in costumes can be unaffordable for some families. In relation to laptops and computer devices, the officer explained that whilst the council has rebuilt and distributed hundreds of laptops, we know there is still demand. Housing and homelessness also is a major factor where children may be sharing rooms or have limited opportunities to study. The context around pupils in receipt of FSM is also a key consideration, as we know our numbers are increasing and that for some children, there are other considerations such as children who may be young carers, may be armed forces children, or where English is a second language.

The presentation discussed the action plan in detail, highlighting how each of the strategic objectives were being addressed and members were advised that these objectives linked to the strategic priorities through alignment to the Corporate Plan, the Chief Officer's Report, the EAS Business Plan and the individual service plans. The next steps would be to reflect on feedback from the select committee and to review the strategy, bringing it back to select committee for endorsement.

The chair thanked the Head of Achievement and Attainment for the very detailed presentation that is available via the meeting page on the council's website. He invited questions from members.

Member Challenge:

- Given the pandemic and children not being in school, I believe some families have received packed lunches and that some have received monies?

Yes, that is the case. We have made sure the money has gone directly to families. Initially we did offer packed lunches for parents to pick up but that wasn't convenient for them so it's better that it has been given to families to prepare meals at home.

Councillor Powell declared a personal but non-prejudicial interest as a Governor of King Henry VIII School in making the following statement:

- We find that the attainment of pupils in receipt of FSM has improved, so the efforts to better support them are really helping, which is encouraging.

We know that schools are doing their best and part of the presentation is to show that schools can't do this on their own as there are so many other factors and the EAS are providing support to schools and schools are supporting parents. We need to continue to improve this to support these pupils as best we can and the blended learning offer has been helpful for some pupils but it cannot replace the school environment.

- Given that a lot of our concern is whether all of those entitled to FSM are claiming the entitlement, is there an anomaly in the pattern in the increase in take up of FSM at Key stage 3 in comparison to the other keys stages, which wouldn't necessarily be expected? Is there an explanation for that? Is it a change in take up or poverty patterns?

You are quite right and it's difficult to see if parents have decided at that stage to choose a different option or whether perhaps children at this stage feel they are too embarrassed to be receiving FSM. This stage of transition in going to secondary school can be quite difficult. It's a complex situation but we hope to have more data very soon to clarify this which would help us to increase take up.

- In the presentation, school trips were mentioned and it is very sad to hear that children were unable to go on a trip due to affordability. Is there any way that Parent Teacher Associations could collect money for low income families to provide a funding source?

Schools have a Pupil Development Grant which they could use for this but it is for the schools to determine how that money is spent. We are beginning to look at the cost of a school day, which would encompass the cost of a trip, or dressing up for an event such as Red Nose Day or World Book Day and we are factoring in activities where rather than parents having to provide the materials, the schools could facilitate that. The Chepstow cluster are looking at this at the moment and we will be talking to all the heads about this in due course.

- In relation to school uniforms, are parents made aware of the recycling of uniforms prior to children transitioning to comprehensive school?

They are advised of the scheme, but this does need further consideration, particularly for expensive items such as blazers.

- I recall a long standing stigma related to FSM and from my own experience, I have seen how easily children in receipt of FSM can be identified through queuing systems. Is it possible to devise a system where payment is in advance and pupils are issued with tokens so that pupils are indistinguishable in respect of those who have paid or are in receipt of FSM?

This issue does appear frequently and in many different ways from token systems to supply teachers calling the register and then listing pupils in receipt of FSM separately, so I agree that we do need to think about how we address this. The token system is also unfair in that there are restrictions on the value of items purchased which would mean a pupil may not be able to afford a healthy meal and this is an unexpected consequence of what we are trying to achieve.

- I think there is a need to consider any way in which a child in receipt of FSM could be identified. For example, if they receive textbooks free, other pupils may question this so I think careful thought needs to be given to every part of the system. It's a question of how you provide the support without people knowing.

You are right, we need to fully consider every aspect and do this by putting ourselves in the shoes of a child in receipt of FSM and think about how they would feel and what might work and what wouldn't and asking our children what is helpful. We had some feedback about whether we should call it FSM and whether calling it a grant would help because it implies an element of choice. We do need to do more work around this, but you are correct.

Councillor Groucutt declared a personal but non prejudicial interest as a Governor of King Henry VIII School before asking the following question:

- I am the link governor for children in receipt of FSM and vulnerable children at King Henry and I am well aware of the huge investment of time by the school in terms of supporting children and closing the gaps and the school has now reached a point where it is wondering what else it can do as the gap is still there. The latest document containing support strategies is lengthy and it shows that schools really need to think hard about this. Some of the findings of the research in this document are stark in terms of how we are able to close the gap, in that it suggests even when parents and carers have high aspirations for these children, it is the poverty aspect that is the overwhelming force in their lives that will undermine their potential. This has been echoed in your presentation and I feel the gap between the privileged and those in poverty is getting wider. Should our FSM strategy look to address issues such as the increase in the number of activities that are being charged for, such as visits, which are inaccessible to children from disadvantaged backgrounds?

Schools have the opportunity to fund these through the Pupil Development Grant, but we are looking at how schools are spending this and talking to them about their use of this grant, as activities which may seem inexpensive when considered singularly, do add up quickly.

- We have heard in many meetings recently that not all pupils have had the opportunity to learn from home because they did not have the necessary equipment. I know that the council has made great efforts to provide laptops, but are we in a position where we can categorically say that we know how many families are still unable to learn from home or have difficulty doing so? Until we address this, the gap in my view will only continue to widen.

We are confident that our schools know who the children that are struggling are. Whether they all have devices or not is difficult to gauge but we are still receiving requests and we're doing our best to meet those as best we can. We know the pressure these families are under and

going forward, there will be families with different levels of needs and we need to think of them almost as individual cases.

- Co-opted Member Maggie Harris: Unfortunately this question was inaudible and could not be minuted. The officer attempted an answer.

With regard to the uptake of FSM, as a local authority, we can look to address the take up and to make sure that everyone that is eligible applies. It is disappointing that the breakfast option has had poor take up and some schools have provided a bag for children to take home at the end of the day to have the following morning.

Chairs Conclusion:

I'd like to offer thanks to our Head of Achievement and Attainment for bringing this detailed report to us for thorough consideration. We often think of Free School Meals in its literal context, however, we can now appreciate that it has much wider implications. The select committee has listened and learnt much more about this topic. We posed questions around how best we could provide people with support during covid 19 by offering families money to provide meals. We also talked in detail about the Pupil Deprivation Grant and how we could work with schools to ensure this is spent in the best possible way. We discussed school trips, visits and activities, uniforms and computer equipment and we recognised that whilst there are difficulties in masking which children are children in receipt of FSM, we need to undertake a forensic examination of each and every process and discuss what would work with pupils and with schools to avoid stigmatising children. As a council, we must seek to put in place strategies to support children and families. We welcome the return of this strategy at the appropriate juncture.

4. Cadarnhau dyddiad ac amser y cyfarfod nesaf

The meeting ended at **4.05 pm**