LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Hybrid meeting held on 8th February, 2024.

The Committee agenda is available here.

The recording of the meeting is available here.

<u>Present</u>: Councillor R.R. Thomas (Chair); Councillor H.M. Payne (Vice-Chair); Councillors A. Asbrey; W. Gilligan; R. Godfrey, E.J. Goodjohn; W.A. Hennessy; N.P. Hodges; J. Lynch-Wilson; J.M. Norman; N. Marshallsea and E. Penn.

<u>Co-Opted Members</u>: M. Price (Roman Catholic Church), L. Barrowclough (Parent Governor – Primary Sector), G. van der Burgt (Parent Governor – Secondary Sector), R. Goodjohn (Vale Youth Forum); J. Clemett and T. Williams (Vale Youth Council).

<u>Also present</u>: Councillor R.M. Birch (Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language.

797 ANNOUNCEMENT -

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Chair read the following statement: "May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be live streamed as well as recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing."

798 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE -

These were received from Councillor E. Penn and R. Morteo (Church in Wales).

799 MINUTES -

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 11th January, 2024 be approved as a correct record.

800 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST -

Councillor H.M. Payne (Vice Chair) declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 5 -Proposed Corporate Strategy for Children who need Care and Support 2024-28. The nature of the interest was that the Councillor worked for Llamau.

801 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SERVICES ANNUAL PLACEMENTS REVIEW (REF) -

The reference from Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee on 5th December, 2023 was presented by the Operational Manager, who gave an overview of the content of the report.

Following presentation of the report, the Vice-Chair queried whether Officers had experienced an increase in children using the services, who had increasingly complex needs, post the Covid-19 pandemic. In response, the Operational Manager confirmed that this had been the case, and that there had been a significant increase in the levels of complexity of need seen amongst children and young people that the service worked with, in a similar way that education services had also witnessed a similar rise amongst Vale of Glamorgan pupils. They added that there had been a particular rise in emotional wellbeing and mental health issues amongst young people.

Councillor Lynch-Wilson subsequently commended the work of the Council's fostering team, who they had recently met with. The Operational Manager echoed this comment, and further advised that the Council was making significant efforts to recruit more foster carers.

Councillor E.J. Goodjohn subsequently asked whether a family or child who were being discharged from support were then seen as being 'at the edge of care', and whether the children were still monitored and assessed for their support needs following their discharge. In response, the Operational Manager advised that when looking to discharge a care order, the courts needed to be involved and would have the authority to action the discharge. They additionally advised that Officers usually prepared a care and support plan for such children and families, and that in most instances, the relevant case remained open for at least six months, on a care and support basis, to ensure that there would be no issues around the discharge.

In response to a subsequent question from the Chair, the Operational Manager advised that over the past three years, the Council's reliance on and need to use independent fostering agencies had increased. This was reflective of a significant national shortage of foster carers. The Officer added and it was difficult to project when the numbers of external foster placements may begin to decrease, and that all Local Authorities across Wales were working together in relation to recruitment of foster carers.

With no further comments or queries, it was subsequently:

RECOMMENDED – T H A T both the covering reference from Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee and appended report, be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the covering reference, the appended report, and to discussions at the meeting.

802 PROPOSED CORPORATE STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN WHO NEED CARE AND SUPPORT 2024-28 (DSS) –

The report was presented by the Learning Links Manager and provided Committee with an overview of the proposed Corporate Strategy for Children Who Need Care and Support 2024-28

The proposed Strategy attached at Appendix 1 to the report was the third Vale of Glamorgan Corporate Strategy for Children Who Need Care and Support. First endorsed by Cabinet in October 2016, the initial three year Strategy marked a significant change in recognising the responsibilities of the whole Council in enabling children in need of care and support to receive the right help at the right time to improve their well-being and protect them from harm, and in aligning the roles of multiple directorates in delivering the associated actions.

The second Strategy built on those foundations and positively reflected the cross-sector relationships within its Action Plan. The third Strategy continued this legacy having been developed in partnership with external partners in Health, the Third Sector and through engagement with children and young people and their families and carers.

The proposed Strategy identified how, utilising an integrated model of services, the needs of children, young people and their families would be met, within the resources available to the Council and its partners, during the period 2024 to 2028.

Following presentation of the report, in response to a query from Councillor Marshallsea regarding how the services outlined in the report were promoted, the Learning Links Manager advised that Officers aimed to be more creative in sharing their messaging going forward, and also to be proactive and preventative in their approach. They added that having clear, explicit and up to date information on services available that was readily accessible to families online, was also important.

In response to a subsequent query from Dr. M. Price, the Learning Links Manager advised that although the resourcing of the actions in the strategy would be a challenge, their understanding was that the strategy would be delivered using existing resources. This meant that actions within the strategy would need to be prioritised and structured according to those that were achievable in the shorter and in the longer term. The Officers added that partnership working, especially with the third sector and health services, would be key in achieving the aims of the strategy, and that key partners were committed to the collaborative work within the strategy.

In response to a subsequent question from Councillor Penn, the Operational Manager from Social Services advised that a small number of Care Leavers that the Council worked with were in receipt of the Universal Basic Income as part of the pilot through Welsh Government, and that Officers had found the pilot scheme to be extremely successful despite some teething issues.

In response to a subsequent query from the Chair in relation to what the report's reference to 'embedding Individual Development Plans (IDPs) and Personal Education Plans (PEPs)' meant in practice, the Learning Links Manager and Head of Additional Learning Needs and Wellbeing advised the following:

- PEPs needed to be robust and updated regularly;
- A professional portal had been developed to allow Officers to have oversight of the PEPs of children cared for in the Vale of Glamorgan;
- Officers were working with colleagues within the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) team to align the IDP process with the work outlined in the report, to ensure a joined-up and person-centred approach;
- There was confidence that Officers could deliver on the action of embedding these aims by September 2024;
- There was currently sufficient capacity to action the number of PEPs and IDPs required, although ongoing resourcing regarding the actioning of IDPs was a recognised pinch-point, and an increase in capacity was needed for this.

In response to a subsequent question from Councillor Gilligan regarding the support offered to children who were fostered around their schooling, the Learning Links Manager advised that provision was matched to the child's needs within schools, and would include, for instance, additional pre-admissions meetings and support with transitioning from school to school. Provision was provided on a child-led basis, and met each child's individual needs and so each package of provision per child was different. They added that Vale of Glamorgan schools were indeed child-centred in their approach, and that fostered children and young people would be supported into a new school, with their progress then monitored as they settle in.

RECOMMENDED -

- (1) T H A T the progress made in developing a new four-year Corporate Strategy and Action Plan for Children who need Care and Support, be noted.
- (2) T H A T having considered the proposed Strategy and the associated Action Plan, Committee's feedback inform the final draft of the Strategy.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report, and to discussions at the meeting.
- (2) To inform the development of a final draft of the Strategy for approval by Cabinet.

803 ANNUAL EQUALITY MONITORING REPORT 2022-23 (REF) -

The reference from Cabinet on 11th January, 2024 was presented by the Operational Manager for Corporate Communications, Participation, Equalities and Directorate Development.

Following the Operational Manager's overview of the content of the report, in response to a query from Councillor Hennessy, the Officer advised that they would contact the team responsible for administering a scheme to provide shopping vouchers to homeless residents, in order to provide Committee with details regarding the levels of uptake of this support.

In response to a subsequent question from R. Goodjohn in relation to a lack of representation for people who identified as non-binary in terms of their gender, the Director of Corporate Resources advised that Officers were looking at ways to improve the fact that a form used for data collection had not included an option for selecting non-binary as respondents' gender. They added that the reason for this omission may have been due to requirements around the way the data was shared with another agency, and that they would contact relevant colleagues in order to confirm the reason behind this to Committee.

In response to a subsequent question from Councillor Hodges regarding reports made to the Councillor by users of the Green Links community transport scheme, around delayed and back-dated invoicing, the Director of Corporate Resources advised that they needed to contact the relevant Officers to obtain details of the situation, and that they would then provide an update regarding this to Committee as soon as possible. The Operational Manager for Accountancy added that there had recently been steps taken to address issues experienced regarding debt recovery. They added that if there were specific cases that Councillor Hodges would like them to liaise with the income management team on, the Operational Manager would be happy to do so.

In response to a subsequent question from Councillor Hennessy, the Operational Manager advised that they could pass on a suggestion regarding schools requiring transport making use of the Green Links scheme, to Transport and Education colleagues, for them to investigate the feasibility of this.

In response to a subsequent query from the Vice-Chair regarding the taxi service in the Vale of Glamorgan appearing to be inaccessible to children, young adults or older people with disabilities, and the contractual obligations the Council has to ensure that taxis are accessible, the Operational Manager advised that they could liaise with colleagues in the Licensing team to explore the parameters and any opportunities available to enhance the accessibility of transport options.

In response to subsequent questions from the Chair, the Operational Manager stated that while they could not advise on when a forthcoming Welsh Government Disability Action plan would be published, they did see it as being a potential driver for the Council's future strategic equality objectives. On the Chair's second question, the Officer advised that they would obtain the data relating to the cost of the use of external training providers in order to report this back to Committee.

RECOMMENDED – T H A T having considered the reference from Cabinet, and the appended report, Committee's comments be referred back to Cabinet for consideration and inclusion in the final version of the Annual Equality Monitoring Report.

Reason for recommendation

In order to make Cabinet aware of the views of this Committee, and to enable publication by 31st March, 2024 to meet the Council's statutory duties.

804 REVIEW OF VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL STRATEGIC EQUALITY OBJECTIVES FOR PERIOD 2024-25 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet on 11th January, 2024 was presented by the Operational Manager for Corporate Communications, Participation, Equalities and Directorate Development.

Following presentation of the reference, the Vice-Chair highlighted equality around mental health issues and how this had been included within the protected characteristic of disability, whereas they were of the opinion that it warranted a separate discussion, as it affected such a large number of people, especially post-Covid 19. In response, the Officer agreed with the importance of mental health issues, and advised that greater separation and detail could be included in future strategic equality objectives.

RECOMMENDED – T H A T, having considered the report and appendices as part of the consultation process, their contents be noted, and this Committee's comments regarding Mental Health be considered by Cabinet.

Reason for recommendation

In order that this Committee's views are considered by Cabinet ahead of the publication of the final draft of the Strategic Equality Objectives for the Period 2024-25.

805 INITIAL BUDGET 2024/25 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2024/25 TO 2028/29 PROPOSALS FOR CONSULTATION (REF) –

Cabinet had referred the proposals to the Committee on 18th January, 2024 for consideration. The Operational Manager for Accountancy provided the Committee with an overview of the report via a PowerPoint presentation.

The report provided Members with an updated financial position for the Council following the UK Government Autumn Statement and Welsh Government Budget. The report set out the Council's proposed budget for 2024/25, including initial savings proposals and use of reserves to deliver a balanced budget for 2024/25.

For context the report contained a summary of the principles set out in the Financial Strategy that had helped shape the proposals.

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with the opportunity to oversee and scrutinise the proposals and included details of future transformation and reshaping proposals to support the Council's finances in the medium term. The report also described the approach taken to developing the budget proposals, and of the process for consultation ahead of formal consideration of final budget proposals by Cabinet and Council in the coming weeks.

The report emphasised the challenge the Council had in maintaining sustainable finances and services in an environment of greatly rationed funding alongside ever increasing social care pressures. It being noted that delivering Social Services potentially took up 31% of the Council's resources, up from 29% in 2023/24 and 25% in 2015/16.

Following the presentation Councillor Hennessy enquired as to whether the Operational Manager could advise the Committee how much over budget the Council was at the current time with regard to School Transport. In response, the Manager advised that the home to school transport service was projecting an overspend of approximately £600,000. There had been some additional funding but this related to demographics in special schools and the budget did not reflect inflationary pressure. She was aware that the Education and Neighbourhood Services departments had held meetings recently to consider how the pressures could be mitigated going forward, and would be happy to follow this up with the relevant officers and advise Members of the Committee accordingly.

In response, Councillor Hennessy stated that in his view parents needed assistance in supporting getting their children to school and that further funding would benefit parents in supporting them in this regard. The Director of Learning and Skills however, advised that having regard to the transport policy if pupils were outside of the catchment area they would not be entitled to free school transport it being noted that parents would be advised of this when applying for places. Councillor Hennessy further enquired as to whether in the officers opinion schools were likely to receive any extra funding and if not would the Council be expecting to make redundancies.

The Operational Manager advised that the Council was working with schools to address budget pressures, some areas for example, being around agency costs and procurement with suggestions having been made that such areas be managed collectively. There had previously been redundancy proposals put forward to address budgetary issues it being noted that redundancies would just part of proposals being considered. The Director also advised that that day a ministerial announcement had been made regarding additional funding for Wales in relation to Social Care and to support the teachers' pay award, however, having regard to the fact that the Social Care element of it was considerable, it left little funding to support the pay award. The Director further commented that further to the Operational Manager for Accountancy's comments she was aware that some schools having regard to budget issues may very well have to consider redundancies. This the Director reiterated had also been seen during the current

financial year noting that the position would be even tighter in the forthcoming year. However as previously mentioned the Council was considering a number of initiatives to support schools, acknowledging that it was a very difficult situation.

- R. Goodjohn, Vale Youth Forum representative, referred to the Post 16 proposals with regard to transport, commenting that this was one of the highest priorities for young people advising that the Youth Forum were against the proposal. The increase would more than likely, he said, mean that young people would either take the car or not actually go to school at all. He felt that the proposal was targeted against rural areas acknowledging that most people in Barry could possibly walk to school. There was also the feeling that school bus services were unreliable and that increasing the charges would be, in his words," kicking them when they were down" and he put forward a recommendation that when considering the budget the Council be requested to put school transport as a priority for Post 16 pupils.
- T. Williams, Vale Youth Council, representative, enquired as to notwithstanding the use of ICT equipment, what other ways were the Council planning to reduce energy within schools. The Operational Manager advised that there were a number of decarbonisation proposals set out in the budget as contained within the next item on the agenda relating to the Capital Programme which included for example looking at the use of PV panels and heat pumps.
- J. Clement, Vale Youth Council echoed R. Goodjohn's comments reaffirming that the Vale Youth Forum were opposed to the proposals relating to Post 16 transport. The Operational Manager advised that she would be more than happy to feedback the comments to the service area advising that Post 16 transport was something that the Council had been considering for some time, advising that the reason that the proposal had been put forward was because it was a non-statutory service and as part of all the budget proposals all non-statutory services were being reviewed given the weight of the cost pressures for the Council.

Councillor Hodges highlighted that it was important for young people to be aware that the actual issue was in the failure of Welsh Government to provide the funding and drew comparisons with Scotland where transport funding was free for under 22s.

Councillor Payne queried the cost pressures relating to the demand for school places noting that there was more demand for English school places and queried what the plan would be in this regard. The Director of Learning and Skills in response advised that this was referred to in the Capital Programme report with the intention to be addressed in more detail in a future Cabinet report detailing proposals relating to a rolling programme for sustainable communities for learning.

Councillor Marshallsea enquired as to whether the ALN school in the western Vale would reduce the requirement for school transport. The Director stated that currently no land had been identified for an ALN school, but it was clear provision was required. Again, the Director referred to a future report to be presented to Cabinet in respect of a rolling programme for schools which would refer to the requirement for a second ALN school.

Following a query from Councillor Lynch-Wilson regarding the provision of an autistic spectrum facility, the Head of Additional Learning Needs and Wellbeing advised this was a growing area and it was hoped that the proposals would meet the current need recognising that it may also be a question around future need.

Councillor Gilligan asked whether the Council had received more demands for free school meal places. The Head of Service for Community Learning and Resources in response, advised that all children in primary schools were entitled to free school meals and there had been a huge uptake in families wanting to access free school meals.

Councillor Goodjohn, not a member of the Committee, with permission to speak took the opportunity to advise that school funding would be increased from 4.5% although noting a large part of the increase would be taken up by the teachers' pay rise.

The Chair subsequently enquired as to whether the Director had been advised of the funding timescales and when that funding for Education was to be received by the Council. The Operational Manager stated that she had had varying figures from Welsh Government with much of the money being proposed to be ringfenced for Social Care with other amounts coming via the Council's RSG but for schools she advised the figure would not be able to support the differential for the teachers' pay award. With regard to any further support in respect of payments for the teachers' pay award, the Director of Learning and Skills confirmed that both the Ministers for Education and Welsh Language and Finance Minister had been lobbied by most Local Authorities in Wales which had included lobbying for having regard to the potential consequences of not receiving further funding. It also being accepted that should any further money become available that the teachers' pay award and pensions be prioritised although early indications were there would be no further additional funding for the coming year.

Following consideration of the report it was subsequently.

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the revised funding and spend assumptions, along with the draft savings proposals be noted, and this Committee's views be referred for scrutiny at the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee, and for a composite response to be developed and referred back to a Special Cabinet on 29th February, 2024.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the report, and to discussions at the meeting, and to ensure that Cabinet are aware of the views of this Committee.

806 DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMME PROPOSALS 2024/25 TO 2028/29 (REF) –

Cabinet had referred consideration of the report to the Committee on 18th January, 2024. The report set out the current 5-year Capital Programme for the period 2024/25 to 2028/29 and the Capital Bids that had been submitted for the period detailed in Appendices 1 2 to the report.

The Council was facing significant pressures in relation to price inflation and the cost-of-living crisis which had seen increases in the costs of materials and labour. This had an impact on the current schemes within the Capital Programme and also the funding available to fund new schemes within the Capital Programme.

The total value of capital schemes over the next 5 years was £376.618m and this is summarised in the table below. This included £22.349m for the Band B Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, £78.565m for Education pipeline schemes and £205.775m for the Housing Improvement Programme.

Table 1 – Summary of schemes in the 5-year Capital Programme

Directorate	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000	2028/29 £000
Learning and Skills	21,360	2,360	3,750	4,435	2,000
Social Services	1,297	975	100	100	100
Environment	9,519	5,662	3,685	3,685	3,685
Housing	38,745	38,209	41,970	39,634	47,217
Place	3,643	1,605	1,305	1,305	1,150
Corporate Resources	704	250	569	862	862
City Deal	1,069	1,117	844	0	930
Pipeline Schemes	28,108	43,750	17,057	3,000	0
Total	104,445	93,928	69,280	53,021	55,944

Table 2 – Summary of funding of the schemes in the Capital Programme

Funding	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000	2028/29 £000
General Capital Funding	6,986	6,986	6,986	6,986	6,986
Capital Receipts	3,259	2,044	1,166	2,346	2,191
Reserves	13,713	10,749	8,362	7,960	7,262

Unsupported	32,473	35,633	31,082	27,624	33,935
Borrowing	, -	,	- ,	, -	,
Grants and					
Contributions	48,015	38,516	21,684	8,105	5,570
(Including S106)					
Total	104,446	93,928	69,280	53,021	55,944

Since the initial Capital Programme proposals, other pressures had emerged, and some additional schemes had been included in Appendix 1. A list of bids and additional pressures that had been included in the 2024/25 to 2028/29 Capital Programme were detailed in Appendix 3 to the report. New schemes funded over the five-year programme included over £5.5m of Education bids to support the school estate, £480k to improve Social Services Residential Homes, an additional £6.5m to contribute towards highway improvements and £875k for tree planting and cyclical maintenance of trees.

The Finance Support Manager presented the proposals noting that as no further indication had been received from Welsh Government it had been assumed that from 2025/26 onwards the level of Capital funding would be flatlined at £6.986m and would then remain constant for the remainder of the period of the Programme.

The Chair referred to documentation where it mentioned that funding had been sought for the specialist resource base at Pencoedtre High School with a request as to where that money was being sourced from. The Operational Manager advised that she was aware that the Council was considering looking internally for that funding as the need to identify funding was quite urgent, and that she would aim to provide an update for Members as soon as possible. The Chair subsequently requested that his comment be referred back to Cabinet with it subsequently being

RECOMMENDED – T H A T, having considered the draft Capital Programme for 2024/25 to 2028/29, the comments of this Committee regarding Pencoedtre High School be passed to the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee, as the lead Scrutiny Committee, in order for the Committee's views to be forwarded to Cabinet.

Reason for recommendation

In order that Cabinet be informed of the comments of this Committee, before making a proposal on the Capital Programme.

807 WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN (WESP) ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23 (DSS) –

The report was presented by the Operational Manager for Strategy, Community Learning and Resources. Its purpose was to update Committee on the progress of the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) Annual Review Report 2022-23 and the feedback received from Welsh Government.

Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh Speakers Strategy placed a duty on all local authorities in Wales to increase the proportion of all school year groups that received their education through the medium of Welsh and placed a particular emphasis on increasing the number of learners in Year 1 taught through the medium of Welsh. A key commitment within the plan was the proposal to increase the number of Year 1 children taught through the medium of Welsh to 24% by 2031-32. This equated to approximately 390 year one places being made available by 2031-32. This target was challenging and in the middle of the target range set by Welsh Government.

To address this duty, the Council had produced a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2022-32 vision and strategy which was approved by Cabinet on 8th September 2022. An Annual Review Report 2022-23 (attached at Appendix A to the report) was required to be submitted to Welsh Government on the year one performance of the WESP. This was submitted on 28th July, 2023 with the Annual Review Report feedback (attached at Appendix B to the report) received from Welsh Government on 14th November, 2023. The feedback from Welsh Government was excellent and provided a basis for ongoing discussion and support. No amendments or revisions to the report were required as a result of the feedback received.

The report outlined the key points within the Annual Review Report which could be considered in full alongside the feedback received from Welsh Government.

Following presentation of the report, in response to a question from Councillor Hodges regarding the idea of adding a second Welsh Medium comprehensive school and how advanced such a concept may be, the Officer advised that opportunities to develop Welsh Medium provision in future was being looked at, and that these would be subject to factors such as consultations and availability of funding.

In response to a question from Councillor Marshalsea regarding ALN provision in Welsh Medium schools, the Officer subsequently advised that the Council were looking at opportunities to develop Welsh Medium Specialist Resource Bases (SRBs) to support children with conditions such as Autism, and that this was part of the action plan for the current year. The Head of Additional Learning Needs and Wellbeing added that one Welsh Medium SRB was already in use as a pilot, and that this would be discussed at a future meeting of this Committee, with a view to making the base permanent at Ysgol Gwaun Y Nant.

In response to a subsequent query from the Vice-Chair regarding Welsh Medium ALN provision and its impact on parental choice of schools, the Officer advised that work around this was underway. They added that rates of ALN were lower amongst primary age children in Welsh Medium education than in English Medium schools, although the gap was narrowing. They further advised that there were ALN specialists who taught in the Welsh Medium in all Vale of Glamorgan primary schools. The Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources advised that recruiting teachers that taught through the medium of Welsh and specialised in ALN was a key challenge. Work was being undertaken to develop the workforce regionally, but this would only be fully realised over the longer term.

In response to a subsequent question from the Chair on timescales associated with growing the Welsh Medium education workforce, The Operational Manager and Welsh Education Officer advised that this was a long-term work in progress, and that they hoped to be able to provide an update to Committee with the next report on this matter.

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the contents of the Annual Review Report 2022-2023, and the feedback received by Welsh Government in terms of the long-term commitment outlined in our Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2022-32, be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the report, and to discussions at the meeting.