

No.

## LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote Meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> January, 2022.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#).

The recording of the meeting is available [here](#).

Present: Councillor G.C. Kemp (Chair); Councillor R.M. Birch (Vice-Chair); Councillors S.J. Griffiths, T.H. Jarvie, J.M. Norman, A.C. Parker, S.D. Perkes, L.O. Rowlands and N.C. Thomas.

Co-opted Member: Dr. M. Price (Roman Catholic Church).

Also present: Councillors L. Burnett (Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration) and B.T. Gray (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health).

### 740 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”.

### 741 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> December, 2021 be approved as a correct record.

### 742 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations were received.

### 743 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SERVICES ANNUAL PLACEMENTS REVIEW (REF) –

The Head of Children and Young People Services presented the report which the Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee, on 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2021, had referred to the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee for their consideration. The report outlined the actions taken within Children and Young People Services during 2020/21 with regard to placement provision for Children Looked After (CLA) and the priority actions for 2021/22.

The report demonstrated the volatility of the placement budget and the significant impact individual cases could have on overall expenditure. Key influences included: the increasing complexity of children's needs; the Welsh Government "When I am

No.

Ready” policy (which extended the time children can remain in foster placements beyond the age of 18); the use of remand placements where local authorities had become responsible for the costs of looking after children who are not allowed to live at home while they are the subject of criminal proceedings; and the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health, with permission to speak, emphasised that within the service area the needs of children were always prioritised above consideration of budgetary matters, and he wished to extend congratulations to staff for their work, particularly with regard to the substantial increase in the number of foster carers within the Vale of Glamorgan.

In response to queries from Members, the Officer added that:

- While an increase in COVID-19 cases as a result of the Omicron variant had impacted some teams within the service area, all were still functioning and staff members were adhering to all mechanisms put in place to reduce transmission of the virus. Teams had, from the onset of the pandemic, been required to be creative in how they were delivering support, with much provision continuing in person but with staff also learning how virtual provision could work.
- The “When I am Ready” scheme, which enabled young adults to remain with their foster carer until the age of 21 had been in place for some years, and had to be a shared decision between the foster carers those in their care. The principle of the scheme was important however it did impact the service area in terms of foster care placements being taken up, although the Officer emphasised to Members this was not viewed negatively. The Officer advised she would obtain figures regarding the number of individuals involved in the scheme within the Vale and circulate them following the meeting.
- Regarding the impact of the pandemic on backlogs in court, at the beginning there had been a request to prioritise safeguarding applications over other processes, for instance adoption orders, which were not deemed emergencies. While there had been some easement in terms of court capacity, this did not always coincide with capacity within the service or the Council’s Legal services. However, the service was seeing more opportunities to make applications and achieve discharges of care orders.
- Although specific figures would vary across Local Authorities there was a general upward trend in terms of increasing numbers and a struggle for capacity, and the same broad themes could be observed across Wales.
- Looking forward to the same report for next year, the Officer and Cabinet Member anticipated that unaccompanied children seeking asylum would feature as Local Authorities would be required to accommodate a certain number per cycle, and the Vale was currently preparing its response to this along with Cardiff.

Councillor N.C. Thomas noted that following the presentation of the same report to the Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee, Members had discussed the possibility of using their social media presence to widen the reach of any promotional material the Council was using to increase the number of foster carers, and he

No.

hoped that Members of the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee would be happy to do the same, with the Chair and Officer's agreement.

Having considered the reference and the report, Scrutiny Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the Children and Young People Services Annual Placements Review be noted.

(2) T H A T the thanks of the Committee be passed on to the Children and Young Person Services team for their hard work during difficult circumstances.

Reason for recommendations

(1&2) Having regard to the contents of the reference and discussions at the meeting.

744 THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PUPILS' LITERACY SKILLS IN THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN (DLS) –

The Principal Improvement Partner and the Strategic Lead for Literacy, Language and Communications at Central South Consortium (CSC) presented the report which provided an overview of how the coronavirus pandemic had impacted on pupils' literacy skills in schools across the Vale of Glamorgan. It considered how schools were actively addressing the impact on pupils' literacy through the identification of priorities in school development plans, and their use of the Welsh Government's Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards (RRRS): Accelerating Learning Programme grant. In addition, the report outlined CSC's literacy strategy, as well as the professional learning offer currently available for schools to support literacy development.

The report featured examples of practice from schools across the Vale of Glamorgan. This was to exemplify points raised in the report and to give a flavour of the work that had taken place in schools across the Local Authority.

Having fully considered the report it was subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the findings of the report regarding the impact of COVID-19 on pupils' literacy skills in the Vale of Glamorgan be noted.

(2) T H A T the ongoing strategic work undertaken by schools to actively address the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on pupils' literacy skills be noted.

(3) T H A T the support available to schools to support their literacy development through the CSC Literacy Strategy and the professional offer programme be noted.

No.

(4) T H A T Committee's appreciation and thanks for the hard work being undertaken in this area be noted.

Reason for recommendations

(1-4) Having regard to the contents of the reference and discussions at the meeting.

745 EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY REPORT CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM 2020 – 2021 (DLS) –

The report, presented by the Managing Director and Deputy Managing Director at CSC, provided an overview of the work of the consortium in the academic year 2020-2021. It included a commentary and evaluation on the efficiency and effectiveness of the work of CSC and its contribution to school improvement across the region.

The main body of the report provided an analysis of the progress made in relation to a number of key strands of work that CSC identified in partnership with Local Authorities and schools as priorities within its Business Plan for 2020-2021. During 2020-2021, four of the Consortium's main areas of work – Support for Governors, Digital Learning, Early Career Pathways and Leadership Support and Development, were selected for focused evaluation. The report provided an overview of the activities undertaken in relation to each strand, provided quantitative and qualitative information on outputs and outcomes, and comments on the impact achieved so far.

Having fully considered the report it was subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the report outlining the impact of Central South Consortium's work be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the reference and discussions at the meeting.

746 SUPPORT FOR YOUNG CARERS IN THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN (DLS) –

The Vulnerable Groups Manager presented the report which provided an update on how the Vulnerable Groups Team continued to support the education of young carers.

The report outlined how the Vulnerable Groups Team collaborated with Social Services, schools and the third sector to provide support for young carers in school. Since January 2020, there had been a sharp rise in the number of young carers, and the report indicated that a potential factor in this was improved identification of young carers at a school level.

Following her presentation of the report, the Officer addressed Members' queries as follows:

No.

- Schools were very aware of the fact that there was under-reporting in terms of the number of children who were young carers, and viewed the issue as a long-term project.
- The Vulnerable Groups Team had been meeting with operational and strategic leads within schools to discuss the strategies that could be used to address under-reporting. A key approach was changing the narrative around the work of young carers in an attempt to remove any shame or stigma, for instance describing young carers as having superpowers, and addressing this message to the school as a whole.
- As the Council was approaching PLASC (Pupil Level Annual School Census) time, schools were being asked to take another look at their data submissions in the hope that the data this year might more accurately reflect the number of young carers in the Vale.
- Young carers were articulate and wanted to be listened to, and were making sure the Vulnerable Groups Team were aware of the support they felt they needed.
- Extra provision was child-centred and guided by the feedback of young carers, as there was no one best way of helping them. For instance, a homework club to help young carers catch up could be open to a wider group of pupils so young carers weren't singled out. Also, if caring responsibilities meant a young carer could be late to school on some days, they could have a pass which meant teachers would recognise the need to provide some additional support to that pupil in an appropriate way.
- INSET days had been used to share strategies and resources with schools and, going forward, it was intended that they be used to speak with governing bodies and Councillors.
- There were members of the Vulnerable Groups Team who specialised in supporting young carers transitioning between Key Stages 4 and 5 and ensuring they did not end up not in education, employment or training (NEET).

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration, with permission to speak, wished to praise the phenomenal work of the Vulnerable Groups Manager and her team, noting that in the Officer young carers had someone on their side who represented their voice in schools and to Elected Members.

Having fully considered the report it was subsequently

**RECOMMENDED – T H A T** the support provided by the Local Authority and Committee's thanks to the Vulnerable Groups Manager and staff members working within the service area be noted.

#### Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the reference and discussions at the meeting.

No.

747 REVENUE AND CAPITAL MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL TO 30<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2021 (DLS) –

The Operational Manager for Accountancy presented the report which advised of the progress relating to revenue and capital expenditure for the period 1st April to 30th November 2021.

With regard to revenue it was anticipated that the forecast for Learning and Skills at year end could be an outturn within budget. School transport remained a cost pressure for the Directorate however it was anticipated that this would be offset by underspends elsewhere within the budget. A savings target for the year had been set at £59k, and it was anticipated that these savings would be achieved in full by year end.

The currently approved capital budget had been set at £37.950m, and the report set out a number of changes which had been made to the Capital Programme since the last report to Committee.

Having considered the report it was subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the position with regard to the 2021/22 revenue and capital budgets be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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

748 3<sup>RD</sup> QUARTER SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATION TRACKING 2021/22 AND UPDATED COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME SCHEDULE 2021/22 (MD) –

The report advised Members of progress in relation to the Scrutiny Committee's historical recommendations and the updated Forward Work Programme Schedule for 2021/22 for the Committee's consideration. Appendix A to the report contained the 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter (October to December 2021) recommendation tracking and Appendix B was the Committee Forward Work Programme schedule for 2021/22, an up to date version of which had been circulated to Members and made available alongside the agenda on the Council's website the day before the meeting.

The report outlined several changes which had been made to the Work Programme schedule for Members' consideration and approval.

In response to a query from Councillor N.C. Thomas, the Assistant Democratic Services Officer advised that a recommendation report was being prepared in respect of the Cost of Schooling Task and Finish Group and this would be circulated to Group Members for their consideration as soon as possible, with a view to concluding the Group's work before the end of the municipal year.

Having considered the report it was subsequently

No.

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the status of the actions listed in Appendix A to the report be agreed.
- (2) T H A T the updated Committee Forward Work Programme Schedule be approved and uploaded to the Council's website, subject to amendments as discussed and agreed during the meeting.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) To maintain effective tracking of the Committee's recommendations.
- (2) For information.