

LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Reconvened (from 8th September) Remote Meeting held on 6th October, 2022.

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

The Meeting recording is available [here](#).

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

Co-opted Members: Dr. M. Price (Roman Catholic Church) and R. Morteo (Church in Wales).

Also present: Councillors R.M. Birch (Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language) and E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health).

316 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.”

317 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors W. Gilligan and N.B. Marshallsea; and L. Barrowclough (Parent Governor – Primary Sector).

318 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations were received.

319 ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN MONITORING REPORT: QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE 2022/23 (DLS) –

The performance report was presented by The Director of Learning and Skills and outlined the Council’s progress at Quarter 1 (Q1) (1st April, 2022 to 30th June, 2022) towards achieving its Annual Delivery Plan (2022/23) commitments as aligned to its Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives.

All 4 Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives were attributed a Green performance status at Q1 to reflect the good progress made to date in meeting the Council’s Annual Delivery Plan commitments for 2022/23.

94% (341 out of 362) of planned activities outlined in the Council's Annual Delivery Plan had been attributed a Green performance reflecting the positive progress made during the quarter, 1% (2) of planned activities were attributed an Amber status and 5% (19) of planned activities were attributed a Red status.

Of the 128 performance measures aligned to the Council's Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives, data was reported for 32 measures where a performance status was applicable. 56% (18) measures were attributed a Green performance Status, 13% (4), Amber status and 31% (10), Red status. A performance status was not applicable for 96 measures, 22 of these related to those measures establishing baseline performance for 2022/23, 67 of those measures were monitored annually and 7 of the measures no update was provided.

In relation to the planned activities within the remit of the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee, 97% (68 out of 70) were attributed a Green performance status, and 3% (2) were attributed a Red status. Of the 5 measures reported, 40% (2) were attributed a Green performance status and 60% (3) were attributed Red status.

The report sought Elected Members' consideration of Q1 performance results and the proposed remedial actions to address areas of identified underperformance. Upon consideration, the Scrutiny Committee was recommended to refer their views and any recommendations to Cabinet for their consideration.

Following the Director's presentation, The Chair highlighted the issues with recruiting specialist staff within Education, which had been referred to in the report, and queried which subjects this was most an issue within, for the Council's schools. In response, the Director advised that there were particular difficulties in recruiting staff to Welsh medium schools, and to teach Welsh as a second language, as well as Science, Design and Technology and Maths (STEM) subjects, but that this was reflective of national trends, and of pressures within the teaching profession generally.

The Head of Additional Learning Needs and Wellbeing added that similar, significant pressures were present within the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) sector, particularly with recruitment of specialist support staff, due, in part, to a lack of resourcing from within agency staffing pools, to fill necessary vacancies. They anticipated that these difficulties were likely to be exacerbated by the usual upturn in sickness leave going into the Winter months, and that there was a need to be prepared for such issues.

The Head of Standards and Provision reiterated the difficulties in recruitment of Welsh Language teachers in particular, and advised that, linked to the issues with recruitment, there was also a lack of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) currently entering the workforce, and that there appeared to be a trend of increased early retirement among teaching staff since the Covid-19 Pandemic, all of which added to the pressure on staffing within Vale of Glamorgan schools.

Following a query from the Chair, it was confirmed by The Director of Learning and Skills and The Head of Standards and Provision, that staffing difficulties were not

being further exacerbated by the newly introduced school curriculum, as this was yet to be implemented fully across all schools, whereas staffing difficulties were pre-existing issues.

The Vice-Chair asked whether there were plans in place to address an anticipated increase in demand for pupil wellbeing services due to the current economic conditions. The Director of Learning and Skills advised that a significant number of steps had been taken around this issue, including specific requirements put in place by a Social, Emotional and Mental Health Panel. The Director added that these issues had been further addressed by the practice of assessing the needs of each child, to identify the best course of action to take to meet their needs from a wide range of support available, whether internal or externally provided, on an individual basis.

The Head of Additional Learning Needs and Wellbeing added that a Social and Emotional Mental Health Action Plan was created pre-pandemic, including a number of actions which were reported on to this Committee in 2021, however, they recognised that the Covid-19 Pandemic has accelerated concerns in this area. They advised that good progress was being made by schools in adopting a 'whole-school approach' to addressing the Social and Emotional Mental Health and Wellbeing needs amongst their pupils, and that successful preventative measures were being taken across the Council's schools. Investment had been made into Trauma-Informed Schools training over the past three years, and this was being added to currently with both additional expert training within this field, and additional investment in counselling services. They recognised that although significant preventative work was being carried out, further work would be needed to address emerging challenges around pupil wellbeing, going forward.

Councillor Lynch-Wilson highlighted the difficulties some pupils had experienced with managing the transition of moving back to the school environment after being kept at home during the pandemic, and praised efforts made by schools in assisting pupils with such issues, which were in some cases still ongoing. On this point, The Director for Learning and Skills agreed that there was an ongoing impact of the pandemic upon schools currently, with attendance levels still being negatively affected, for instance. The Director added that the Inclusion Team were working closely with families of children who found it difficult to return to school, and that there was more work to be done, in conjunction with schools and families, on improving school attendance post-pandemic.

Councillor Penn queried the reasons for the difficulties in attracting staff to teach the Welsh Language and recruiting support staff in particular. In response to this query, the Director of Learning and Skills advised that this was largely due to an insufficient number of teachers available or entering the profession overall, and that this needed to be incentivised, particularly around teaching the Welsh Language. The Director advised that there are schemes available to assist Welsh Speaking teachers in English-Medium schools to access training in order to be able to transfer to teaching within the Welsh-Medium school system, although this had only been taken up by a small number of teachers within the Central South Consortium area to date.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language advised that evidence suggested that teaching staff often preferred working within the English-Medium sector over Welsh-Medium schools because the larger scale of the English-Medium school system provided for increased opportunities for career development and promotion. The Cabinet Member also highlighted the successful work of the Horizon Class within Ysgol Y Deri special educational needs school, in supporting children who had severe difficulties in transitioning back into the school setting, and welcomed the expansion of this project.

The Head of Standards and Provision provided further insight into the Horizon Class initiative. They explained that the project had been set up initially as a trial with eight pupils and had now expanded to accommodate 16 pupils and to meet the growing demand for such provision. They outlined the successes of the project in securing positive outcomes for the pupils involved, in terms of qualifications gained, continued learning accessed, and improved wellbeing.

Councillor Godfrey subsequently made the point that low numbers of Welsh Language teachers available to the Council's schools may be indicative of the levels of Welsh speakers in the area, as compared with other parts of Wales. They also highlighted feedback they had received from teachers, who had cited the difficulties in controlling pupil behaviour as having detracted from the appeal of teaching as a profession, and called for greater support for teachers in this area. To this point, The Director for Learning and Skills advised that while they did not necessarily agree with the Councillor's point, there had been additional work around this with schools, to ensure they had adequate professional learning in place to be able to deal with issues such as disruptive pupil behaviour. This included Trauma-Informed Training which enabled schools to identify reasons behind disruptive behaviour and to implement methods to deal with this. The Director also highlighted that the relaxation of the accountability regime and a move towards pupil-specific targets was intended to assist schools in alleviating some of the pressure on teaching staff that was caused by publication of school results, under the previous system.

Councillor Hodges picked up on Councillor Godfrey's point with regards to numbers of Welsh speakers in the South Wales area, highlighting that both the numbers of Welsh speakers, as well as the extent of Welsh-Medium education provision in The Vale of Glamorgan were growing, and that given this, the Council and Welsh Government needed to put plans in place to be able to meet this growing demand.

Finally, Councillor Norman reiterated the issue of pupil discipline in schools, relaying concerns expressed to them by teachers around difficulties in managing disruptive pupil behaviour. They suggested that extra provision outside of mainstream classes was required, in order to assist schools and teachers to manage disruptive classroom behaviour.

With no further questions or comments relating to this report, the Committee subsequently:

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the performance results and progress towards achieving the Annual

Delivery Plan 2022/23 commitments, as aligned to the Council's Corporate Plan Wellbeing Objectives within the remit of the Committee, be noted.

(2) T H A T the remedial actions to be taken to address areas of underperformance and to tackle the key challenges identified within the remit of the Committee be noted.

Reasons for recommendations

(1) To ensure the Council clearly demonstrates the progress being made towards achieving its commitments in the Annual Delivery Plan 2022/23 aimed at making a positive difference to the lives of Vale of Glamorgan citizens.

(2) To ensure the Council is effectively assessing its performance in line with the requirement to meet its performance requirements, as outlined in the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and reflecting the requirement of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, that it maximises its contribution to achieving the well-being goals for Wales.

320 REVENUE CLOSURE OF ACCOUNTS 2021/22 (DLS) –

The report was presented to Committee by the Finance Support Manager. The year-end revenue position was an adverse variance of £13k after net transfers to reserves of £18.151m, made up of £642k transferred into the Council Fund, £18.818m transferred into specific reserves from revenue, £118k drawn down from the Insurance Fund and £1.191m drawdown from reserves to fund the Capital Programme. The Council Fund now stood at £12.510m as at 31st March, 2022.

A revenue savings target of £500k had been set for 2021/22 and there was a shortfall of £120k against this target in the year, the delivery of these savings would continue to be monitored during 2022/23

Following the presentation, the Vice-Chair thanked the Finance Support Manager for their report, and congratulated them on having achieved the difficult task of financing all the work carried out, while remaining well within the allocated budget.

With no further questions or comments relating to this report, the Committee subsequently:

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the financial measures taken and proposed be noted.

(2) T H A T the Final amended 2021/22 budget, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.

Reason for recommendations

(1&2) Having regard to the content of the report and amended budget for 2021/22

which reflects an increase in Revenue Support Grant awarded by Welsh Government during 2021/22 as well as financial measures taken and proposed.

321 CAPITAL CLOSURE OF ACCOUNTS 2021/22 (DLS) –

The report was presented to Committee by The Finance Support Manager. The report informed Committee of the provisional financial position of the Council's Capital Programme for the 2021/22 financial year.

The total capital expenditure during the year was £66.411m which required funding of £1.191m to be drawdown from reserves.

With no questions or comments relating to this report, the Committee subsequently:

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the year-end capital position for financial year 2021/22 be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the content of the report and the year-end capital position for financial year 2021/22.