

No.

LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 9th December, 2024.

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

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

Present: Councillor R.R. Thomas (Chair); H.M. Payne (Vice-Chair), Councillors A. Asbrey, S. Campbell, E.J. Goodjohn, E. Goodjohn, S.J. Haines, W.A. Hennessy, N.P. Hodges, J. Lynch-Wilson and N.B. Marshallsea.

Co-Opted Members: M. Werrett (Church in Wales), Dr. M. Price (Roman Catholic Church), L. Barrowclough (Parent Governor – Primary Sector), G. Van Der Burgt (Parent Governor – Secondary Sector), E. Woodfield (Vale Youth Council) and G. Scott (Welsh Medium Education).

Also Present: Councillors L. Burnett (Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources), R.M. Birch (Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language) and G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing).

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”.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillor W. Gilligan and I. Da Silva (Vale Youth Council).

MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 4th November, 2024 be approved as a correct record.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor E.J. Goodjohn declared an interest in Agenda Item No. 5 – Elective Home Education (EHE) Update. The interest was a personal interest as Councillor

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Goodjohn was previous an Elective Home Educator at the time covered within the report.

Councillor E. Goodjohn declared an interest in Agenda Item No. 5 – Elective Home Education (EHE) Update. The nature of the interest was a personal interest in that a family member had been part of the Elective Home Education programme.

Dr. M. Price declared a personal interest in relation to Agenda Item No. 7 – Capital Monitoring for the Period 1st April to 30th September, 2024. The nature of the interest was that Dr. Price was a Governor for St. Richard Gwyn School which had been provided with money for a capital works project.

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2025/26 TO 2029/30 REFRESH AND UPDATE (REF) –

Cabinet, on 28th November, 2024, had referred the report to the Council's Scrutiny Committees to review the work mitigating the cost pressures for consideration and for any recommendations to be referred back to Cabinet.

Councillor H. Payne referred to a decline in pupil population and asked whether that had been offset by an increasing number of children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). The Operational Manager – Accountancy clarified that figures were presented in £s with an average cost per pupil significantly higher in a special school as opposed to a mainstream school. Historically an increase of around 40 pupils per year had been factored in, but that projection may have increased to 50 pupils, but that would have to be checked.

Councillor Payne also asked whether there was any information to show that people were specifically moving to the Vale of Glamorgan because of the support offered by Ysgol Y Deri. The Operational Manager – Accountancy stated that it would be better if a response was provided by Learning and Skills.

Councillor E. Goodjohn highlighted that previously projected budget short falls were £23m in 2023 and £30m in 2022. Councillor S. Haines commented that an overall potential budget short fall of £14m was significant.

In response to a query from Councillor E. Goodjohn regarding the initial focus of the new Procurement Officer, the Operational Manager – Accountancy stated that focus could potentially be around supporting schools and aligning those contracts as well as looking at central procurement. As there was a lot of commonalities in terms of procurement within schools, it was likely that cluster approach could be adopted. That was something that would be considered. The Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources added that a significant amount of work had already been undertaken in terms of understanding each contract, contract re-negotiations and training and workshops for school staff. Schools would be doing a lot of work on a cluster basis, with Council business managers supporting all schools.

The Chair queried whether as part of the budget settlement process had any assessment on the potential impact on jobs been undertaken. In response, the

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Operational Manager – Accountancy advised that the Council was still waiting for the final settlement from Welsh Government and what kind of efficiencies would be applied to schools. As 95% of a school’s budget related to staff, there could be the potential for redundancies, which was something that the Council wanted to avoid if possible.

The Chair commented that figures indicated that the Vale of Glamorgan was the second lowest funded of all of the Welsh Authorities, and he queried what form of lobbying took place to encourage Welsh Government to change its position. In response, the Operational Manager – Accountancy advised that representations would be made through the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), and also through such groups like the Association of Directors of Social Services. The WLGA, on behalf of the Council, would have conversations with Welsh Government around the planning assumptions and some of the impact of those decision making to feed into Welsh government as part of the decision-making process. There would also be lots of conversations at various levels.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the reference and report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the Cabinet reference and appended Medium Term Financial Plan 2025/26 to 2029/30 Refresh and Update report, outlining the work to mitigate the cost pressures, be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of both the Cabinet reference, the appended report and discussions at the meeting.

ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION (EHE) UPDATE (DLS) –

The Vale of Glamorgan (VoG) like all Local Authorities (LAs) had longstanding obligations to ensure that all children of school age received a suitable and full-time education at school or otherwise.

The VoG, along with nearly all LAs in Wales, had seen significant increases in the number of parents choosing to home educate in recent years. Comparative data was limited and restricted in its use. The LA’s EHE data showed an ongoing increase over time which had subsequently continued to rise since schools fully reopened post Covid closures in April 2021 and over the last year.

Welsh Government regulations had increased obligations upon all Welsh LAs to maintain a reasonably accurate database of all learners living in the VoG who were of school age and “so far as it is possible to do so” the LA should do all that was reasonable, practicable and appropriate to identify children.

Welsh Government published a Home Educators EHE guidance document in June 2023.

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Acting Lead Inclusion Manager clarified that the Council had not issued a School Attendance Order for a long time. The Council wanted to initially work with families and provide opportunities for them to re-engage, through home visits and telephone discussions. It was really important for the Council to provide opportunity for one-to-one discussions with families and to clearly explain the situation to parents. The Lead Officer for Social Inclusion and Wellbeing added that the team worked tirelessly to support those families that had chosen to home educate, but the increased demand of children with Additional Learning Needs had created additional pressures and challenges for staff.

Councillor E.J. Goodjohn commented that it was important to note the positive work undertaken by the Engagement Officer, that had enabled good relationships to be built up between families and the Council, and which had empowered parents to provide a great education for their children.

Councillor H. Payne referred to new regulations placing requirements on Local Health Boards (LHBs) and general medical contractors (as data controllers), to share information about children usually resident in the LHB area, with the relevant LA on an annual basis. Councillor Payne asked whether there had been any links with the Health Board and any children missing education. In reply, the Acting Lead Inclusion Manager clarified that no such links had been established as the Council was awaiting the outcome of recent Welsh Government consultation. The Lead Officer for Social Inclusion and Wellbeing added the Council was waiting for the outcome of the pilot and the ability to cross reference data, but there were concerns with regard to data protection. If the pilot projects deemed it satisfactory, then there would still be resource challenges for the Council.

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the progress made in the area of Elective Home Education during the last 12 months, be noted.

(2) T H A T the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee receives a further progress update report in 12 months in relation to the ongoing delivery and further measures to raise awareness of the use and impact of the Elective Home Education grants for the support of Elective Home Education learners. The progress report to also include the likely impact of any implementation of the proposed amended statutory guidance on Home Education and the proposed draft regulations which incorporate the requirement for all Local Authorities to maintain a Child Missing Education (CME) data base.

Reasons for recommendations

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

(2) To further update the Scrutiny Committee as to the progress made in relation to the ongoing delivery, and further awareness raising of the use and impact of the EHE grants for the support of EHE learners.

No.

YSGOL PEN Y GARTH: UPDATE ON SCHOOL IN STATUTORY FOLLOW-UP (DLS) –

Estyn inspect quality and standards in education across Wales. During the autumn term 2022, Ysgol Pen y Garth was placed in special measures following their inspection. Ysgol Pen y Garth's progress had been monitored by Estyn on three occasions following the core inspection. Following their recent monitoring in October 2024, Estyn judged the school to have made sufficient progress in relation to their recommendations. As a result, His Majesty's Chief Inspection of Education and Training in Wales have removed Ysgol Pen y Garth from the list of schools requiring special measures.

Several members of the Committee expressed appreciation to the school, and it was suggested for a visit to the school to be arranged.

Councillor H. Payne queried the level of debrief provided to headteachers and staff after each inspection visit. The Principal Improvement Partner advised that in terms of Ysgol Pen y Garth's monitoring visit, what Estyn had ensured that there were members who inspected the school back in November 2022 present for all the three monitoring visits that took place since the initial inspection. That was something that was valued by the Headteacher, as it provided some continuity in that the inspectors were clear about the situation at the school. The inspectors had also made it clear about next steps and what areas they would be looking at during future visits, and they were very mindful of the situation at the school and the pressures the staff were under. The inspectors were in regular communication with the Headteacher throughout the process, but also the Headteacher had a link inspector that she could contact at any time.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the Estyn monitoring outcomes for Ysgol Pen y Garth made against the recommendations for their core inspection in November 2022, be noted and the school to be congratulated on their removal from the list of schools requiring special measures.

Reason for recommendation

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

CAPITAL MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL TO 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2024 (DSL) –

The report provided an update on the progress of the Capital Programme for the period 1st April to 30th September, 2024. Details by scheme were shown in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 provided a summary of the position of the Capital Programme by Directorate from approval at Council on 6th March, 2024 through to 30th September, 2024, including any changes requested within the report.

No.

The report sets out any requested changes to the 2024/25 and future years' Capital Programme and noted the current approved Programme of £137.168m.

It was important to note that many areas were continuing to experience an increase in costs associated with delivery of schemes. Tenders were being received over the current allocated budgets and officers were reporting the requirement to re-negotiate submitted tenders.

Schemes would be closely monitored over the coming months and it was anticipated that slippage requests would be requested in future reports.

Officers would continue to work with project managers and sponsors to ensure value for money and that all possible funding opportunities were identified and fully explored.

It was agreed that information relating to damage caused by Storm Darragh would be communicated outside of the meeting.

With regard to the use of agency staff, the Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources advised that a large piece of work was underway reviewing the agency spend, looking at the amount of spend, the type of spend, where it's spent, and what companies had been used. The work would also include workflows, what agency staff were doing and how long were they in the school and for what sort of cover.

More information regarding the use of modular classrooms at Dinas Powys would be sent via email.

It was

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the progress made in delivering the 2024/25 Capital Programme within the remit of the Committee, covered in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.
- (2) T H A T the use of Emergency Powers within the remit of the Committee, detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.
- (3) T H A T the changes to the 2024/25 Capital Programme and future years' Capital Programme within the remit of the Committee, summarised in paragraphs 2.4 and 2.5 and detailed within the body of the report from paragraph 2.11 be noted.

Reason for recommendations

- (1-3) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

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QUARTER 2 REVENUE MONITORING 2024/25 (DSL) –

The revenue position for 2024/25 continued to reflect challenging demand and inflationary pressures with continuance of the key service pressures that the Council reported as part of the 2023/24 outturn position into 2024/25. The cost pressures allocated as part of the 2024/25 budget were adjusted to reflect the funding available and therefore did not provide full funding for pressures and these pressures had continued to increase across the first half of 2024/25. There was evidence of increasing demand in respect of Children's and Young People's Care and Adults' Social Care reflecting an increased incidence and complexity of need as well as significant increases in the cost of placements and care packages. Support for Additional Learning Needs (ALN) continued to be an area of significant pressure within Learning and Skills with corresponding pressures on school transport costs for pupils in ALN provision and the overspend reported of £1.231m was significant in the context of over £500k of cost pressures awarded to this area for 2024/25.

Across the services inflationary pressures were also being experienced in respect of pay, most notably where market forces were being utilised and for the funding gap between provision for the 2024/25 pay award and the likely pay award for 2024/25. The Council only allocated very limited contractual inflation as part of the 2024/25 budget and no general inflation for some years and this would have a general impact on the resilience of revenue budget. The delays on implementation of savings would also impact the 2024/25 outturn across services.

Unplanned use of reserves of approximately £14.226m, which represented a further increase on the unplanned use of reserves reported at Quarter 1 (Q1) of £13.629m the Council had various workstreams progressing to mitigate the unplanned use of reserves and reduce in year overspends.

The majority of the unplanned use of reserves would be met from Service Reserves, however £486k had been shown against the General Fund it was not envisaged that this funding would be taken from the General Fund at year end and this sum would be the first priority for offsetting or mitigation in year should there be any emerging underspends or areas of mitigation identified in year. This would ensure that the Council Fund was maintained at the policy level for this financial year.

Challenging savings and efficiency targets had been set out for 2024/25 which included a target of £7.676m Corporate savings. The progress against these savings targets was reflected in the Appendix to the report. The Council also continued to monitor the delivery of 2023/24 savings not achieved in year.

In the context of the additional pressures reported as part of Quarter 2 (Q2) Monitoring it was now the case that all use of reserves was being considered by Senior Leadership Team to provide additional rigour. Further recruitment controls were also now being implemented equating to a recruitment freeze for posts that did not have statutory requirements. Further examination of the use of Grant Expenditure would be undertaken by the Accountancy team. In addition some workstreams identified as part of reshaping would be accelerated such as Demand Management in respect of Adult and Children's Social Services and School Transport arrangements.

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Councillor H. Payne queried whether the use of out of county placements would be reviewed again. In response the Operational Manager – Accountancy advised that out of county placements was again a cost pressure for 2025/26, and all pressures would be reviewed as part of the budget setting process and the use kept under scrutiny.

Councillor E. Goodjohn commented on good value and work provided by the Council's Youth Service, who had been supportive in assisting people retrain and find work and she stated that the Citizen Science project was very good.

Subsequently it was

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the position with regard to the Authority's 2024/25 revenue budget, be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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

ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN MONITORING REPORT: QUARTER 2
PERFORMANCE 2024/25 (DSL) –

The performance report presented the Council's progress at Quarter 2 (1st April to 30th September, 2024) towards achieving its Annual Delivery Plan (2024/25) commitments as aligned to its Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives.

Following a proof of concept using the Council's existing Corporate Performance Framework of measures and actions to develop its use of Power BI to support performance reporting, Quarter 2 performance snapshot for the current Annual Delivery Plan (2024/25) had been produced which was detailed in the presentation appended to the report at Appendix A. The snapshot provided an overview of progress against planned actions and performance indicators aligned to the Council's 4 Well-being Objectives and listed any exceptions (Red actions attributed a Red RAG rating) in an accessible format. This had been produced as part of developing the Council's approach and would be subject to further refinement informed by the views of officer colleagues and Elected Members throughout the 2024/25 performance reporting period, with a view to informing the Council's monitoring and reporting arrangements for the new Corporate Plan 2025-30. The Council was currently working towards producing Scrutiny Committee remit specific performance snapshots which would be reported at Quarter 3.

The presentation appended at Appendix A to the report provided a summary of progress against the Council's Annual Delivery Plan commitments for 2024/25. Slides 2-7 of the presentation provided a performance summary of the Annual Delivery Plan at Quarter 2. Slides 8-12 provided a Committee specific overview of progress against the ADP priorities aligned to the remit of the Scrutiny Committee.

No.

The report sought Elected Members' consideration of Quarter 2 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.

Councillor H. Payne in terms of Adult Community Learning, referred to 85% of adults achieving a nationally recognised qualification and she queried whether there were other indicators which should the benefit of that service. In reply, the Senior Corporate Performance Partner advised that there would other indicators, and these would be shared with the Committee.

Councillor Marshallsea asked for clarification about community focused schools and the appointment of a manager. In reply, the Senior Corporate Performance Partner stated that a manager had been appointed who had recently attended a meeting with headteachers to raise awareness of their role.

Councillor Marshallsea also queried the way that schools were ranked in terms of pupil attendance, and particularly the impact that resource bases had on the figures. The Acting Lead Inclusion Manager advised that data for all resources bases would be looked with an aim of segregating out the data. That was not a straightforward exercise, but it would assist with having comparative data for schools.

In reply to a query regarding the increase in Welsh learners within the Council, and whether staff were allowed time out off work to attend Welsh lessons, the Senior Corporate Performance Partner advised that staff were encouraged to undertake learning as part of their work time. There was a challenge as there was drop off in the number of staff progressing from the foundation phase of the learning.

Councillor J. Lynch-Wilson commented on the amount of work undertaken about school exlusions.

Up to date attendance information for Pencoedtre High School would be emailed to the Committee.

It was

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the Quarter 2 performance results and progress towards achieving the Annual Delivery Plan 2024/25 commitments, as aligned to the Corporate Plan Well-being 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.

Reason for recommendations

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