

No.

## LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2025.

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) and G. Van Der Burgt (Parent Governor – Secondary Sector).

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

### 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; Dr. M. Price (Roman Catholic Church), L. Barrowclough (Parent Governor – Primary Sector), I. Da Silva and E. Woodfield (Vale Youth Council).

### MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2025 be approved as a correct record.

### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor A. Asbrey declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item 6 – Summary of Estyn Inspection Outcomes for Autumn Term 2024 and Update on Schools in Statutory Follow Up. The nature of the interest was Councillor Asbrey was a Governor for Dinas Powys Primary School. The nature of the interest meant that Councillor Asbrey remained in the meeting for the duration of the item.

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Councillor S. Haines declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item 6 – Summary of Estyn Inspection Outcomes for Autumn Term 2024 and Update on Schools in Statutory Follow Up. The nature of the interest was that Councillor Haines was a Governor for St. Athan Primary School. The nature of the interest meant that Councillor Haines remained in the meeting for the duration of the item.

Councillor J. Lynch-Wilson declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item 6 – Summary of Estyn Inspection Outcomes for Autumn Term 2024 and Update on Schools in Statutory Follow Up. The nature of the interest was that Councillor Lynch-Wilson was a Governor for St. Athan Primary School. The nature of the interest meant that Councillor Lynch-Wilson remained in the meeting for the duration of the item.

### QUARTER 3 REVENUE MONITORING 2024/25 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2025 as contained within the agenda was presented by the Operational Manager – Accountancy.

Councillor H. Payne queried whether the 51% of schools showing a budget deficit was that as a result of issues from the new Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Act. In reply, the Operational Manager stated that clarification would be provided, but ALN was a known cost pressure. There were also other factors causing budget deficits in schools.

Councillor A. Asbrey if the Council would be able to protect the 241 school transport routes that it currently provided. In response, the Operational Manager advised that there was internal working going on, with a co-ordinated school transport workshop recently held to identify some potential initiatives that could be put in place such as staggered times and the use of public transport.

Subsequently it was

**RECOMMENDED – T H A T** the Quarter 3 position with regard to the Authority's 2024/25 revenue budget be noted and the following comments referred to Cabinet for its consideration:

- In relation to the 51% of schools showing a budget deficit was that as a result of issues from the new ALN act.
- Would the Council be able to protect the 241 school transport routes that it currently provided.

### Reason for recommendation

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

No.

## CAPITAL MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL TO 31<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER, 2024 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2025 as contained within the agenda was presented by the Operational Manager – Accountancy.

The Chair queried how would the Council ensure value for money and efficiency in its spending on such a variety of projects. The Operational Manager advised that the Council's Property Team managed the majority of the projects for the Learning and Skills Directorate. That Team was really well versed in the tendering process and the ability to deliver projects within the funding envelope. Projects would also be the subject to several business cases.

Having considered the report it was

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the Quarter 3 Capital Monitoring 2024/25 report be noted.

### Reason for recommendation

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

## SUMMARY OF ESTYN INSPECTION OUTCOMES FOR AUTUMN TERM 2024 AND UPDATE ON SCHOOLS IN STATUTORY FOLLOW UP (DLS) –

The Principal Improvement Partner presented the report.

Estyn inspected quality and standards in education across Wales. A new inspection framework had been introduced in September 2024. From September 2024, Estyn would be engaging more regularly with schools. Schools would now have a core inspection and an interim visit within the 6-year inspection period (2024 – 2030).

During the autumn term 2024, two primary schools received a core inspection (Gwenfo Church in Wales Primary and St Athan Primary). One secondary school, Stanwell School, received an interim visit.

None of the two schools that received a core inspection were in statutory follow-up (significant improvement and special measures).

A 'spotlight' highlighting interesting or innovative practice was included within the inspection report for Gwenfo Church in Wales Primary, with a focus on partnership and community working.

At the start of the autumn term, two schools from the Vale of Glamorgan, Ysgol Pen y Garth and Pencoedtre High School, were in Estyn statutory follow-up category (special measures) and Llanfair Primary in Estyn Review following their inspection in spring 2023.

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As reported to the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee in December 2024, Estyn judged Ysgol Pen y Garth in October 2024 to have made sufficient progress in relation to their recommendations. As a result, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales had removed Ysgol Pen y Garth from the list of schools requiring special measures.

In December 2024, Estyn met with leaders of Llanfair Primary and the Local Authority to discuss progress in relation to their recommendation. Estyn judged that the school had made sufficient progress in addressing the recommendations, and they had been removed from the list of schools requiring Estyn Review.

Pencoedtre High School remained in special measures. The progress of the school was monitored by Estyn on a termly basis.

Invited to provide an overview of the pilot for the new Estyn Core Inspection, the Committee welcomed Jon-Paul Guy, Headteacher for Dinas Powys Primary School and James Mansfield, Headteacher for Ysgol Stanwell School.

From the perspective of a primary school. Jon-Paul Guy highlighted the following:

- Previously five inspection areas now three; Teaching and Learning; Wellbeing, Care Support and Guidance; Leading and Improving.
- Shorter inspection – arrive mid-day on Monday, feedback on Wednesday approx. 3pm.
- The pre-inspection process remained the same.
- The inspection was more focussed on the quality of teaching and there had been a move away from lengthy lesson observations to more learning walks spending 20 to 30 minutes observing lessons.
- The initial reporting of observations had changed, with verbal feedback provided the Headteacher and Chair of Governors. The general outcome could also be shared with staff in confidence.
- The Reporting Inspector then considered the evidence base and from the feedback and wrote a report which would be sent out as draft for factual inaccuracies a few weeks later.
- The report was now approximately two pages long. A parental summary was one page.
- The reports highlight areas of particular interest or effective practice, and does not cover all the feedback shared, sometimes reported by exception.

With regard to an interim Estyn visit to Stanwell School in November 2024, the Headteacher, James Mansfield, highlighted the following:

- The visit lasted two days and there were four Inspectors.
- There was a focus on Core Inspection Recommendations / School Improvement Plan (SIP).
- Feedback to the Headteacher and as short letter published on Estyn's website
- Interim visits would not trigger an earlier core inspection.
- The visit consisted of 21 lessons 'observed', inclusive of two full joint lesson observations, 2 members of staff were seen twice, Interviews with: 11 Year 8

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pupils (inclusive of books), 6 Year 10 pupils and 4 Year 9 pupils (inclusive of books). 4 Interviews / Presentations with the Senior Leadership Team; and two staff panels (8 teachers in total).

Councillor H. Payne asked both Headteachers how did they feel during the inspections. Jon-Paul Guy stated that the Inspectors were professional with a particular focus on the positive aspects of the school. The Inspectors were very mindful of the wellbeing of the staff during the inspection. James Mansfield commented he felt the same. There was a nuance in terms of the approach adopted by some Inspectors around providing direct feedback during a visit and having an open dialogue around negative aspects identified. He noted that the interim visits felt very different to a full inspection. Both core and interim visits were now also more supportive in terms of feedback and Headteachers being asked to regularly comment during visits. It was also felt that the new visits were more supportive, but a consistent approach from the Inspectors in terms of having a more open dialogue with schools would be of benefit.

Councillor A. Asbrey referred to lesson observations and whether staff felt less stressful from shorter observations. Jon-Paul Guy commented that from shorter observations teachers would often comment that the Inspectors did not see some part of a lesson which would have been useful. There could be a feeling that the Inspectors had missed something that would have tied a lesson together.

With regard to progress at Pencoedtre High School and with reference to paragraph 2.21 of the report stating that around a half of teachers did not deal decisively with pupils' lack of engagement and low-level behaviour; they did not use the school's behaviour management strategies appropriately, the Principal Improvement Partner added that Estyn had identified that the policy was not being consistently applied within the school. As a result, the Assistant Headteacher from Whitmore High School who had been seconded to the school, was working as a coach to support teachers and this included a focus on the management of behaviour in class. The Committee was advised that although the school had been in special measures for a period of two years, Estyn had observed improvements in a number of areas, but there had not been sufficient progress for Estyn to remove Pencoedtre from special measures. Therefore, more time was required to allow new practices to embed.

Subsequently, the Committee

#### RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the inspection outcomes for the Autumn term be noted and congratulations sent to the two schools that received a core inspection as there was no Estyn follow up activity and the progress made by the Llanfair School resulting in them being removed from the list of schools requiring Estyn review be noted.

(2) T H A T progress in relation to Pencoedtre High School be noted.

#### Reason for recommendations

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

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LEARNING AND SKILLS DIRECTORATE PLAN 2025/26 (INCLUDING ACTIVITIES, PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND ASSOCIATED PERFORMANCE TARGETS) TO DELIVER VALE 2030, THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN 2025-30 (DLS) –

The report presented for Members' consideration the planned activities, performance measures and associated performance targets in the Learning and Skills Directorate Plan 2025-26 (attached at Appendix A). This Directorate Plan aligned primarily to the remit of the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee. The other Directorate Plans were being considered by relevant Scrutiny Committees and their comments and recommendations were to be considered by the Corporate Performance and Resources Committee to form a composite reference to Cabinet on the five Directorate Plans for 2025-26. This approach broadly followed that taken in scrutinising the Council's Revenue and Capital Budget proposals.

The Directorate Plans had been informed by the Council's commitments in Vale 2030, the Council's approved Corporate Plan (Full Council, 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2025) for the period 2025-30.

All Scrutiny Committees had considered the draft Corporate Plan (December 2024) and their views alongside that of a wide range of key stakeholders had informed the five new well-being objectives and 50 commitments detailed in Vale 2030 which was a five-year plan.

Progressing the activities and associated performance targets outlined in Directorate Plans would help to meet the Council's statutory obligations under the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WBFG). Both pieces of legislation placed specific duties on the Council in relation to reviewing and setting objectives, keeping performance under review and reporting on performance, with a focus on improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Vale of Glamorgan citizens.

Scrutiny Committee Members were asked to review the Learning and Skills Directorate Plan 2025-26 (planned activities and proposed performance measures and associated targets) and how it would support delivery of the commitments and outcomes in Vale 2030.

Members were asked to refer any comments and recommendations with regards to the Learning and Skills Directorate Plan 2025-26 to the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee to form a composite reference to Cabinet on the five Directorate Plans for 2025-26.

Councillor N. Marshallsea queried the 5% budget reductions for resources bases. In reply, the Learning & Skills Strategy & Performance Manager advised that it should be taken in context of the wider factors affecting schools. The reduction would be carefully managed in terms of mitigating any negative impacts.

Councillor Marshallsea asked how the use of Welsh language would be promoted to school staff. The Learning & Skills Strategy & Performance Manager advised that

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there was opportunity for school staff to develop their Welsh language skills outside of normal working hours. Information on take up of training would be sought and shared with Members of the Committee. In addition, the Principal Improvement Partner stated the Central South Consortium had a planned programme of professional learning available to staff on a termly basis in terms of their Welsh. That was based on an annual survey undertaken around the competency of people's Welsh language skills. There was also a specific support available for Learning Support Assistants that could be provided on both a school and cluster level. Opportunities for professional development were available to English medium speakers and also to Welsh speakers that wanted to brush up on their skills.

It was noted that the Directorate Plan did not contain specific references to active travel plans for schools. In response, the Learning & Skills Strategy & Performance Manager advised that activities relating to active travel was a key focus particularly when it came to areas such as Project Zero. In addition, active travel is potentially picked up under another Directorate Plan as well as it being a day-to-day activity. Agreed information be collated on schools that participate in Active Travel to be shared with the Committee.

Councillor E. Goodjohn referred to actions relating to the risks associated to Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and queried what were the mitigating factors planned to reduce risk. He also added that the Council needed to allocate additional resources to the area of ALN. In reply, the Director of Learning and Skills stated that there was a focus on preventative measures to reduce demand on specialist resource bases. Therefore, the Council would work closely with schools to ensure that teachers had the abilities and competencies to support the majority of needs of pupils. To do that there was an intention to work with Headteachers to formulate a plan of action that would enable close working with lead officers for teaching and learning in schools.

Councillor E. Goodjohn queried whether there had been consideration of health outcomes relating to tackling obesity and teaching basic life skills relating to cooking and healthy eating. The Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources replied that the Council undertook lots work in the area of healthy eating within schools which was a key priority for the Big Fresh Catering Company to meet new legislation set by Welsh Government. There were lots of initiatives, such as the School Holiday Enrichment Program, which were focused on supporting schools as well as those deprived communities. The Council also worked with schools and community groups around active travel, and it was a key component of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Program. Healthy eating therefore represented day to day activity which was why it did not appear in the Directorate Plan. Councillor E. Goodjohn added it would be good if additional performance indicators in relation to healthy eating for young people could be considered.

In response to Councillor E. Goodjohn's query regarding work within the Council to promote apprenticeship schemes and could the Council do more to demonstrate success, the Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources advised that there were lots work around that in a couple of different streams. Within the Sustainable Communities for Learning Program and the benefits realisation reports that were part of the Council's tendering process, readers would be able to see the

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work expected from some suppliers in terms of creating opportunities for apprenticeships. There were also other schemes including the Communities for Work Scheme and the Council's internal program, the Quick Start scheme. It was hoped for a report around that work to be presented to the Scrutiny Committee in the future.

Councillor E. Goodjohn queried whether there was any scope for the Council to be more ambitious in relation to the actions around the Council's Youth Service and in terms of how the Council engaged and heard the views of young people. In response the Director stated that within the Council's new Corporate Plan there was an objective to be more systematic when it came to harnessing and utilising the Youth Service and the Youth Council. That meant that there was an aim for the Youth Service to have a greater reach to all Directorates within the Council to share and understand the views and perspectives of young people.

Councillor E.J. Goodjohn asked whether the Council could do more to tackle child poverty, and could more be done to provide young people affordable access to be able to participate and access leisure, sport, cultural and heritage activities. Councillor E.J. Goodjohn also asked whether more could be done to enable better access to examinations for those young people home educated. In response to child poverty and access to leisure and culture, the Learning & Skills Strategy & Performance Manager advised that the Learning and Skills Directorate Plan needed to be read in context with all the other Directorate Plans that formed a joined up and cross cutting picture around poverty. The Directorate Plan was holistic that reflected multiple elements of the Vale 2030 Corporate Plan. Therefore, contribution towards poverty agenda from the Learning and Skills Directorate would be around work undertaken through community focussed schools and also by some of the other initiatives and day-to-day activities previously raised by the Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources such as the Enrichment Program. With regards to access to examinations for young people home educated, it was agreed for information to be sent via email.

Councillor J. Lynch-Wilson stated that it was important to recognise how important the local communities were to the safe and successful running of schools and praised the good work around inclusivity being undertaken.

Councillor H. Payne referred to the Arts Central gallery and the feasibility study of building of a cultural community network, and queried how would the Council encourage those people that would not normally engage with the arts and cultural activities. In reply, the Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources commented that there were lots of work to encourage visitors to the arts and culture spaces. The feasibility study related to the courtyard area between the arts centre and the library and bringing in a more diverse range of art exhibitions to attract new audiences. There was similar work planned for Old Hall in Cowbridge and was on the back of a growth in visitors to the Penarth centre. A report on those initiatives would be presented to Committee.

Information regarding the Sanctuary Nature Neighbours project would be sent via email.



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Councillor N. Hodges asked whether the Directorate Plan contained sufficient long-term focus on the risks and impact following cuts to the benefit system. In response, the Learning & Skills Strategy & Performance Manager clarified that the Vale 2030 was the new Corporate Plan which covered the next 5 years. The Directorate Plan was an in-year service plan focussing on the specific strategic actions and activities for the Learning and Skills Directorate. During the year the Council would undertake an annual self-assessment which was linked to Directorate Plans, and which would factor in new legislation, changing landscapes and new policies. That provided opportunity to potentially changing priorities should the need arise. It was important to recognise that the Vale 2030 Plan did have significant focus around poverty across all Directorates, with the Learning and Skills Directorate Plan having a emphasis on schemes such as community focused schools which had an aspect of tackling poverty.

The Chair, Councillor R. Thomas, stated that some new performance indicators did not contain targets, and he asked whether there was scope for targets to be set; for example, the percentage of secondary school children who reported that they felt engaged and that they had a voice about services and decisions that mattered to them. The Learning & Skills Strategy & Performance Manager, in response, advised that for some new indicators it was not possible to set targets, so for those it was important to set a baseline following during year 1 that could be used as a benchmark to set targets for future years.

Subsequently it was

**RECOMMENDED – T H A T** the comments of the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee in relation to the Learning and Skills Directorate Plan and performance targets for 205/26 be referred to the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee for its consideration in order for a composite response to be developed and referred back to Cabinet on 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2025. The comments relating to the following:

- Additional detail being added in relation to the Active Travel programmes for schools;
- The need for more resources in the area of Additional Learning Needs;
- More resources were required in relation to healthy eating, in order to combat obesity within young people;
- The inclusion of an additional performance indicators in relation to healthy eating for young people and in relation to the Council's apprenticeship scheme;
- Was there scope for the Council to be more ambitious in relation to the actions around the Council's Youth Service and in terms of how the Council engaged and heard the views of young people;
- Could the Council do more to tackle child poverty;
- Was there more that the Council could do to enable better access to examinations for those young people who are home-educated;
- Could the Council provide more opportunities for young people to access leisure, sport, cultural and heritage activities;
- Queried whether the Council could do more to encourage more people engage with arts and culture;

No.

- Did the Directorate Plan contain sufficient long-term focus on the risks and impact following cuts to the benefit system; and
- The need for targets to be set for those new performance indicators where a measure had not been included.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting and to advise the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee of the views of the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee.