

START WELL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting, 7th July, 2025.

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

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

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

Co-opted Members: Dr. M. Price (Roman Catholic Church), L. Barrowclough (Parent Governor – Primary Sector), P. Bond and R. Davies (Vale Youth Council).

Also Present: Councillors R.M. Birch (Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language), G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing) and E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health).

139 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”.

140 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillor E. Penn; G. van der Burgt (Parent Governor – Secondary Sector) and M. Werrett (Church in Wales).

141 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 19th May, 2025 be approved as a correct record.

142 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor J. Aviet declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item 4 – Summary of Estyn Inspection Outcomes for Spring Term 2025 and Update on a School in Statutory Follow-up. The nature of the interest was that Councillor Aviet was a Governor for Oak Field Primary School and also had a family member that was employed at Pencoedtre High School. Councillor Aviet had received dispensation from the Standards Committee so remained in the meeting for the duration of the report.

143 SUMMARY OF ESTYN INSPECTION OUTCOMES FOR SPRING TERM 2025 AND UPDATE ON A SCHOOL IN STATUTORY FOLLOW-UP (DLS) –

Estyn inspected quality and standards in education across Wales. A new inspection framework was 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 spring term 2025, four schools from the Vale of Glamorgan received a core inspection (Oak Field Primary, Fairfield Primary, Ysgol Gwaun y Nant and Ysgol y Deri).

No follow up work was identified by Estyn in relation to Oak Field Primary, Ysgol Gwaun y Nant and Ysgol y Deri. Fairfield Primary was placed in the follow-up category of significant improvement.

‘Spotlights’ highlighting interesting or innovative practice was included within the inspection report for two schools. Two spotlights were highlighted in Oak Field Primary’s inspection report, and five were highlighted in Ysgol y Deri’s report.

During the spring term 2025, eight schools received an interim visit – Llandough Primary, Whitmore High, St Joseph’s Roman Catholic Primary, Albert Primary, Peterston Super Ely Church in Wales Primary, Sully Primary, Pendoylan Church in Wales Primary and Ysgol y Ddraig.

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

The item also included a presentation from the Headteacher for Oak Field Primary School, L. Tweedley, outlining the school’s experience and outcomes following a recent inspection by Estyn, which had identified 2 spotlights of innovative practice, namely:

- Spotlight 1: Develop effective partnerships with parents to support pupils’ learning and wellbeing;
- Spotlight 2: Developing a creative curriculum through a focus on the expressive arts and inquiry-based learning.

Councillor J. Aviet offered congratulations to Oak Field Primary School.

Councillor H. Payne queried an increase in the number of new pupils with early learning and non-verbal challenges. L. Tweedley advised that there had been an increase since Covid-19, and that was why the school had developed language rich environments, surrounding and immersing children with language and through the positive use of role models as well as the use of an appropriate range of language. One of the key programmes used by the school at an early stage and before starting reception, were language play sessions provided by the nursery class teacher, in addition to learning materials and fun activities being sent home to parents to encourage storytelling, reading and non-verbal cues, away from an electronic device.

Councillor S. Haines queried whether there had been an increase in the number pupils going hungry. In reply, L. Tweedley commented that around 7 to 8 years ago Welsh Government introduced a breakfast club offer for all children which was a great initiative and met one of the basic needs of children being fed before learning. L. Tweedley stated that he had not observed an increase but there was a strong awareness for schools meeting the basic needs of children, with information shared with parents.

The Chair, Councillor R. Thomas, queried initiatives used by the school to raise attendance. L. Tweedley stated that if a child was not present at school by 9:30am, and there had not been any prior notification of an absence, then the school would phone a parent to check where the child was. One of the key things used by the school was around having regular routines as well as having fun innovative activities which made going to school an enjoyable experience. That would encourage children to want to go to school. In addition, the school offered class rewards when overall attendance was over 90%. Furthermore, there was positive work being undertaken by the Council's Inclusion Team to support parents, so the core was having positive relationships with parents and pupils.

With regard progress relating to Fairfield Primary School, the Principal Improvement Partner advised that the school had focussing on its Post Inspection Action Plan around which key progress milestones would have been identified. The next Estyn visit was due to take place during the summer of next year, which would focus on progress made by the school to address the recommendations for improvement.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the three schools that received a core inspection where no Estyn follow-up activity was identified be congratulated.
- (2) T H A T the Headteacher for Oak Field Primary School be thanked for sharing their experience of the school's Estyn inspection.

Reason for recommendations

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

144 SCHOOLS BUDGET AND ADMISSIONS FORUM REPRESENTATION (DLS) –

There was currently a vacancy on both the Admissions Forum and Budget Forum for a representative from the Start Well Scrutiny Committee to join the Schools' Budget Forum and the Schools' Admissions Forum. It was therefore requested that the Start Well Scrutiny Committee nominate a representative to join each group. Although traditionally there had been one representative for each, there was no reason why one Member could not be the representative for both.

All Councils were required to have a Schools Budget Forum in accordance with Section 47A of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 as amended by the Education Act 2002 and The Schools Budget Forums (Wales) Regulations. The Authority was required to consult the Schools Budget Forum annually on its schools' budget. The Authority could also consult the Forum, as it saw fit, on any other matters concerning the funding of schools.

The Education (Admission Forums) (Wales) Regulations 2003 required every Local Authority in Wales to establish an Admission Forum. The Forum provided a formal channel of communication between the Vale of Glamorgan Council, its maintained schools, other admission authorities and other key interested parties to discuss the effectiveness of local admission arrangements, consider how to deal with difficult admission issues and advise admission authorities on ways on which their arrangements could be improved.

The terms of reference for both could be found at Appendix A (Budget Forum) and Appendix B (Admissions Forum) to the report.

Two nominations for the positions on both Forums were received and seconded – Councillor W. Gilligan and Councillor S. Haines. Following nominations, members of the Committee were asked to indicate their preference via an electronic vote, and Councillor W. Gilligan was duly appointed to be the representative on both Forums.

Subsequently,

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T Councillor Wendy Gilligan be appointed as the Scrutiny Committee Representative on the Schools Budget Forum.

(2) T H A T Councillor Wendy Gilligan be appointed as the Scrutiny Committee Representative on the Schools Admissions Forum.

Reason for recommendations

(1&2) To ensure that the Forums included a Member of the Start Well Scrutiny Committee.

145 TASK AND FINISH REVIEW ACTIVITY (DCR) –

The report requested Members to consider items and topics of investigatory group work (Task and Finish Review) for the new Start Well Scrutiny Committee.

A range of suggestions were collated from Members of the Committee at its meeting held on 19th May, 2025, with additional suggestions sent to the Chair after the meeting via email.

The Director of Learning and Skills assessed all suggestions and proposed five possible Reviews to be considered for progression. These aligned closely to current

Council priorities and Corporate Plan – Vale 2030, as well as being considered achievable within the 12-week Task and Finish Review cycle.

The proposed suggestions were:

1. What has been the impact on schools having to make difficult decisions to balance budgets.
2. Analysing the variances in school budget surpluses and deficits and identifying good practice and areas for improvement.
3. Creating a School Transport Policy.
4. Review the Additional Learning Needs Resource Bases.
5. Evaluate the running of school buildings, including new builds and identify good practice.

The Scrutiny Committee was therefore requested to prioritise and agree the order in which the Reviews were to be undertaken.

In addition, the Committee was requested to confirm and agree the size and membership of the Task and Finish Review Group. The suggested number of Members on a Task and Finish Review Group was 6, but a lower or higher number could be accommodated based on the wishes of the Scrutiny Committee. Ideally the Task and Finish Review Group would have representation from all political groups and possibly from the Co-Opted Members.

The Committee was also asked to determine if representation from any interested parties outside of the organisation would have merit.

Once the review topic and membership had been agreed, Democratic Services would prepare a schedule of meetings, with it being envisioned for a review to be completed within 12 weeks. This would exclude the summer recess.

It was planned that the first meeting of the Task and Finish Review Group would include appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair. The first meeting would also include consideration of a full Scope of how the Review would be completed. The Group would also be asked to consider the most appropriate time for it to meet and any expert witnesses that it would like to call to provide evidence, guidance and to answer queries.

At the conclusion of the Review, a subsequent report and recommendations would be fed back to the relevant Cabinet Member(s), Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet for consideration.

Two suggestions were put forward for progression as the first review – “Review the Additional Learning Needs Resource Bases” and “What has been the impact on schools having to make difficult decisions to balance budgets”. Following a vote, it was agreed for the review into “Additional Learning Needs Resource Bases” to be progressed first, subject to legal advice being sought around the voting of Co-Opted Member and the selection of Task and Finish Review work. The review “What has been the impact on schools having to make difficult decisions to balance budgets”, would then commence following the completion of the first review. SEE N.B. BELOW

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED – T H A T subject to legal advice around the voting of Co-Opted Members, a Task and Finish Review of the Additional Learning Needs Resource Bases be undertaken as a priority, which when completed will be followed by a Task and Finish review into – “What has been the impact on schools having to make difficult decisions to balance budgets”.

Reason for recommendation

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

N.B. Additional Note – Clarification for Minute No. 145 above, regarding voting rights for Co-Opted Members and Task and Finish Review activity.

Two suggestions were put forward for progression as the first Review – “Review the Additional Learning Needs Resource Bases” and “What has been the impact on schools having to make difficult decisions to balance budgets”. A vote was taken to determine which topic would be reviewed first. The vote was tied. The voting rights of Co-Opted Committee Members on the prioritisation of matters to be reviewed by the Task and Finish Group were subsequently queried and referred to the Monitoring Officer. Legal opinion was that the vote did not relate to education matters and so the votes of the Co-Opted Members were discounted. It was therefore confirmed the outcome of the vote was that the review of “Additional Learning Needs Resource Bases” would be progressed first. The review into “What has been the impact on schools having to make difficult decisions to balance budgets” would then commence following the completion of the first review.