

START WELL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 14th September 2026.

The meeting papers are available [here](#).

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

To view the presentation and subsequent discussion for any Part I agenda item, please click the hyperlink contained in its title below.

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

Co-Opted Members: Dr. M. Price (Roman Catholic Church) and M. Werrett (Church in Wales).

Also present: Councillors R.M. Birch (Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language), L. Burnett (Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources), S.A. Hodges, G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing), Dr. I.J. Johnson and E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health).

219 [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”.

220 [APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE](#) –

This was received from Councillor J. Lynch-Wilson.

221 [DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST](#) –

No declarations of interest were received.

222 [MINUTES](#) –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 6th July 2026 be approved as a correct record.

223 [TO CONFIRM VOTING RIGHTS FOR CO-OPTED MEMBERS OF THE START WELL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –](#)

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the voting rights for those Co-Opted Members present at the Committee meeting be noted.

Reason for recommendation

To confirm the agenda items and voting rights for those Co-Opted Members present at the meeting with voting rights.

224 [PRESENTATION – SCHOOL BUDGET RECOVERY PLANS – UPDATE FROM THE HEAD OF STRATEGY, COMMUNITY LEARNING AND RESOURCES ON PROGRESS IN TACKLING SCHOOL BUDGET DEFICITS SINCE THE PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION OF THE MATTER BY THE START WELL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AT ITS MEETING HELD ON 23RD MARCH, 2026 \(DLS\) –](#)

The Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources provided a PowerPoint presentation which updated on the position in regard to school budget deficits and recovery plans.

The key messages were:

- A new, holistic programme had been developed in partnership with headteachers, governors, the Budget Forum and the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group;
- The focus was on strengthening budget recovery plans, improving monitoring, sharing benchmarking data, providing training, achieving procurement savings and reviewing long-term funding pressures.

In terms of the current position, there were 53 schools in the Vale, 30 of which had approved budgets/recovery plans. 23 schools had not yet had their recovery plans approved and were undergoing further review and support.

Recovery plans were assessed through a strengthened process involving:

- Finance officers;
- HR officers;
- School improvement officers;
- Directorate leadership; and
- Chief Executive and senior finance officers.

Although the programme was still in its early stages, officers reported encouraging progress with the latest overall projected school deficit by March 2029 being £21.2m. That represented an improvement of £22.7m in projected deficits.

Additionally, the actual school deficit in 2025/26 was £6.7m, with the projected in-year deficit reducing to £3.2m.

Subsequently, the Scrutiny Committee

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the contents of the presentation be supported.
- (2) T H A T the Start Well Scrutiny Committee receive a further update report in due course.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the presentation and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) To provide a detailed update position on school budget balances.

225 [WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2025-26 – CABINET: 23RD JULY 2026 \(REF\) –](#)

The reference from Cabinet of 23rd July, 2026 as contained within the agenda was presented by the Welsh and Inclusion Officer.

The report covered compliance with Welsh language standards and the delivery of the Council's Welsh language promotion strategy.

Highlights for 2025/26 included:

- Cyfieithu Cyflym New Digital translation tool;
- The number of staff who accessed a Welsh language course;
- Work with Social services on the Mwy na Geiriau Agenda;
- Working relationship with Menter Bro Morgannwg in particular Gŵyl Fach y Fro;
- Challenges with changes to the Learn Welsh in the Vale contract;
- Challenges with changes to the Work Welsh tutor arrangement last year;
- Challenges with Welsh Language complaints;
- Challenges with reporting on Welsh language skills of staff – due to the multiple systems used.

Appendix Two to the report provided an update on the Council's Welsh language promotion strategy.

Councillor Marshallsea referred to the courtesy / introductory Welsh and queried the inclusion of Welsh language training as part of public facing employee job descriptions. The Welsh and Inclusion Officer replied that because only one member of staff had participated, they had taken steps to get more interaction particularly through Social Services.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED – T H A T Cabinet be advised of the recommendation of the Start Well Scrutiny Committee around the possibility for job descriptions for public facing roles to include a requirement for successful applicants to have or be willing to learn introductory Welsh as a core key skill.

Reason for recommendation

To ensure that front facing staff roles had introductory Welsh language as a core key skill.