

LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 19th September, 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, N.P. Hodges, J. Lynch-Wilson and N.B. Marshallsea.

Co-Opted Members: M. Werrett (Church in Wales), L. Barrowclough (Parent Governor – Primary Sector), G. Van Der Burgt (Parent Governor – Secondary Sector) and G. Scott (Welsh Medium Education).

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 Dr. I.J. Johnson.

367 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”.

368 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors W. Gilligan and W.A. Hennessy; Dr. M. Price (Roman Catholic Church), E. Woodfield and I. Da Silva (Vale Youth Council).

369 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 8th July, 2024 be approved as a correct record, subject to the following inclusion to the apologies of absence which had been submitted but due to technical issues had not been received by officers: L. Barrowclough (Parent Governor – Primary Sector).

370 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

371 WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2023-24 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 11th July, 2024 as contained within the agenda was presented.

Councillor Asbrey highlighted some issues being experienced of families living in Dinas Powys and there not being a Council budget to transport children to Ysgol Pen y Garth. Therefore, there were a number of parents that had sent their children to English Medium schools. In reply, and with permission to speak, Councillor Birch (Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language) stated that she would take up the issue with the School Transport Team.

G. Scott (non-voting observer – Welsh Medium Education) commented on the number of Vale of Glamorgan staff who were not recording their level of Welsh Language understanding. Data within the report encompassed only one third of Council staff. Mr. Scott stated that within his role for the Gwent Health Board they had managed to improve the level of information provided by staff and he would be willing to offer assistance to the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

Councillor Hodges suggested that the Vale of Glamorgan Council should bid to host the 2029 Urdd Eisteddfod in Barry.

Councillor Payne stated that there was a known issue around recruiting staff with Welsh language skills and she asked what the Council could do to maximise opportunities to recruit and retain teaching and other staff. In reply, the Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources advised that the recruitment of staff with Welsh language skills was a well-known challenge and one of the ways the Council was looking to improve the situation was through the use of a graduation scheme from those pupils that had attended Ysgol Bro Morgannwg. That allowed them opportunities to come back and work for the Vale of Glamorgan Council. To support that initiative, the Council had been able to obtain some grant funding from Welsh Government. Progress on the initiative would be provided to the Scrutiny Committee.

In terms of recruiting staff with Welsh language skills, Mr. Scott highlighted that his organisation had seen an increase in applications where the job specification highlighted that free Welsh training would be provided. The Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources added that it was important to ensure that managers allowed staff protected time in order that they could undertake the learning.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the Annual Welsh Monitoring Report for 2023-24 (attached at Appendix 1 to the report) and Update on the Welsh Language Promotional Strategy (attached at Appendix 2 to the report) be endorsed.

(2) T H A T the comments made by the Committee be referred to Cabinet for their consideration, which included the following:

- That the Council considers a bid to host the 2029 Urdd Eisteddfod at Barry.
- That the Council looks to maximise the opportunities to recruit and retain teaching staff and others with Welsh language skills.

Reasons for recommendations

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

(2) In order for Cabinet to consider the comments made at the Scrutiny meeting.

372 ANNUAL CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING REPORT 2023-24 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 18th July, 2024 as contained within the agenda was presented.

Councillor Payne queried whether there was data on the impact of teaching staff implementing safeguarding measures, such as time taken away from other school activities. In reply, the Safeguarding Officer stated that a time and motion study could be considered for a sample of certain schools. Data on concerns raised by staff was available and anonymised information could be provided if requested.

Councillor Campbell highlighted the importance of School Governors completing the relevant Safeguarding modules.

C. Werrett (Co-opted Member) queried whether there was anything within the Safeguarding Policies around the prevention of radicalisation. In response, the Safeguarding Officer stated that radicalisation was a key element of staff training with all school based staff required to take Home Office PREVENT training on a three-yearly basis. In addition, members of a school leadership team would also attend WRAP training and all schools would have procedures in place around instances of radicalisation. In addition, the Safeguarding Officer would also attend school evaluation sessions as part of preparation for Estyn visits to ensure that school policies and procedures were robust around how schools prevented staff and pupils being drawn into extremism.

There being no further comments or queries, the Committee

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the work that had been undertaken to improve corporate arrangements for safeguarding and protecting children and adults be noted.

(2) T H A T the comments made by the Committee be referred to Cabinet for their consideration, which included the following:

- The inclusion of more data on the impact of teaching staff implementing safeguarding measures, such as time taken away from other schoolwork in order to do this.
- The importance of School Governors completing the relevant safeguarding modules.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the reference, appended report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) In order for Cabinet to consider the comments made at the Scrutiny meeting.

373 DRAFT VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT 2023/24 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 5th September, 2024 as contained within the agenda was presented by the Director of Learning and Skills.

Councillor S. Haines referred to issues in relation to Pencoedtre High School and he stated that that should have had a reflection on the assessments within the Council's report. In addition, Councillor Haines referred to a lot of schools that were running a budget deficit and so those two areas required listing within the report and also to be highlighted for continued focus and monitoring. In reply, the Director stated that school budget deficits had been recognised under financial challenges and the use of Council resources, and it was noted that was a continued pressure. Councillor R. Birch (Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language), with permission to speak, stated that she had been in a meeting with other Council Cabinet Members for Education, and all Councils in Wales were in the same position with schools running into budget deficits. The reasons for the deficits were varied, but an important element was an increase in Additional Learning Needs.

Councillor N. Marshallsea stated that within the Annual Self-Assessment there was a section in relation to where the Council spent its money. The Councillor stated that that section should be shared with members of the public in order to help people understand where their Council Tax money was going. The Director agreed and stated that that was something for discussion with the Council's Communication Manager.

Councillor H. Payne highlighted the many positives within the Council's Self-Assessment report but also referred to significant pressures in Safeguarding and Additional Learning Needs. It was also important for the Council to let members of the public know the good work the Council had been undertaking. The good work included some very good inspection reports as well as the additional work teachers undertook outside of school time.

The Chair referred to Well-being Objective 2, point 4, in relation to maximise inclusion and improve attendance and he highlighted the importance around

improving the school attendance rate. In reply, the Cabinet Member referred to work being undertaken by the Inclusion Service to support children with low attendance.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the comments made by the Committee be referred to Cabinet for their consideration, which included the following:

- To ensure a continued focus on monitoring and tackling school deficits and other issues impacting upon teaching staff.
- The importance of highlighting to residents, through the use of public communications, the data on expenditure, etc. contained within the infographics used in the 'What our budget was spent on' section of the Annual Self-Assessment.
- The importance of highlighting what the Council had achieved in areas such as school inspection reports and what additional work teachers undertook outside of school time. As well spending on education, it was important to show what teaching staff undertook in terms of work and these details should be combined.
- The ongoing importance of improving school attendance figures.

Reason for recommendation

In order for Cabinet to consider the comments made at the Scrutiny meeting.

374 CLOSURE OF ACCOUNTS 2023/24 (DLS) –

The Council encountered significant revenue pressures during 2023/24, particular pressures were in respect of inflationary pressures particularly regarding contracts and pay pressures (which reflected cost of living, market pressures and the Council's commitment to paying real living wage).

The Council continued to experience significant demand pressures for supporting Children's Services, Homelessness and pupils with Additional Learning Needs during 2023-24.

The year end revenue position was a breakeven position after net transfers from reserves of £34.235m, made up of £417k transferred from Council Fund, £12.961m from the Housing Revenue Account, £11.785m transferred into specific reserves from revenue and £12.078m transferred from specific reserves to provide one off funding for projects and overspends and £8.779m drawdown from reserves to fund the Capital Programme and for displacement required by capital grants. The Council Fund now stood at £11.106m as at 31st March, 2024.

Challenging savings and efficiency targets had been set for 2023/24 which included a target of £2.75m for schools and £4.628m of Corporate savings. The progress against these savings targets was reflected in the Appendix and, whilst services have mitigated some savings in year in 2023/24, these savings would be kept under

review in 2024/25 as services moved to identify these on a more sustainable basis over the medium term.

After taking account of Directorate movements to and from reserves the revenue outturn showed a surplus of £2.080m which it was proposed be transferred to reserves to be utilised as follows:

- £2m Establish a new reserve to offset Education Deficits in 2024/25 on a provisional basis whilst the Council worked with schools on establishing a co-ordinated approach to tackling school deficits;
- The balance of £80k had been transferred to the General Fund.

The Housing Revenue Account had a slighter reduced projected draw down on the ringfenced reserve of £12.961m to reduce the level of its ringfenced reserve to £3.525m, which was thought to be reasonable in the context of the pressures in the service area in 2024/25.

The level of Useable Reserves reduced in year although by less than had been projected but some of these commitments had been slipped into 2024/25 in accordance with Capital Expenditure slippage. The Council undertook a further reserve reallocation exercise in year as outlined in the 2024/25 budget proposals and this was reflected in the outturn position.

Councillor Haines requested a list of those schools with a budget deficit and whether those schools that were doing well was best practice being shared with other schools. In reply, the Finance Support Manager stated that a list of school balances was contained within the Appendix, and comments regarding best practice would be taken back to the service area.

Councillor Payne referred to the increase of out of county placements for people with additional needs and asked what was the overall budget variance. In reply, the Finance Support Manager stated that information would be sent via email.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the report and the financial measures taken and proposed be noted.
- (2) T H A T the allocation of overall Council surplus as set out below be noted:
 - £2m transfer to new reserve to offset school deficits on a provisional basis in 2024/25.
 - £80k to Council Fund to offset general pressures.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report to inform Members of the outturn and the financial measures taken and proposed.

(2) To inform Members of the allocation of the 2023/24 surplus to support key pressures identified by the Council.

375 QUARTER 1 REVENUE MONITORING 2024/25 (DLS) –

The revenue position for 2024/25 continued to reflect challenging demand and inflationary pressures with continuance of the key service pressures that were seen in 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 in the first quarter of 2024/25. 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. 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 approximately £13.629m, the Council had various workstreams progressing to mitigate the unplanned use of reserves and reduce in year overspends.

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 were reflected in the Appendix. The Council also continued to monitor the delivery of 2023/24 savings not achieved in year.

Councillor Payne stated that she was pleased that the use of agency staff within schools would be investigated further.

The Chair referred to issues with school transport and he asked whether there was any likelihood of the provision around school transport for parents being reduced. In reply, the Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources advised there were challenges in relation to the number of drivers and operators and with increasing costs of transport contracts. The Council was looking at changes to drop off times in order to achieve opportunities around economies of scale but the area of school transport was a highlighted risk.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the position with regard to the Authority's 2024/25 Revenue Budget be noted.

(2) T H A T the virements requested as part of the report be noted.

Reason for recommendations

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

376 CAPITAL CLOSURE OF ACCOUNTS 2023/24 (DLS) –

The report provided detail on the closing of the Capital Programme for the period 1st April, 2023 to 31st March, 2024. Details by scheme that were relevant to the Scrutiny Committee were shown in Appendix 1.

Appendix 2 to the report provided a summary of the position of the Capital Programme by Directorate from approval at Council on 6th March, 2023 through to 31st March 2024, including any changes requested within the report.

Several schemes totalling £5.395m were required to be added late in the Programme and the report noted the current adjusted Programme of £103.829m and capital expenditure during the year of £88.620m.

Despite capital schemes facing continued challenges due to a number of issues, including significant cost increases and shortages of resources, it was pleasing to note that the 2023/24 Capital Programme outturned at £88.620m and 85.35% of the Programme was spent before the end of the financial year.

Due to the dedication, commitment and hard work across all Directorates, the report noted the current adjusted Programme of £103.829m and net slippage of £15.013m which required approval by Emergency Powers into the 2024/25 Capital Programme.

For the Scrutiny Committee, the position regarding the budget was a variance of £3.664m against an adjusted Programme of £28.116m. Outturn for the Scrutiny Committee was recorded at £24.452m and slippage of £3.649m had been requested.

Having considered the report it was

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the year end capital position for financial year 2023/24 be noted.
- (2) T H A T the additional scheme budgets as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be noted.
- (3) T H A T the summary position of the changes in the Capital Programme by directorate from approval at Council on 6th March, 2023 to 31st March, 2024, as set out in Appendix 2 to the report, be noted.
- (4) T H A T the Emergency Power approved in respect of the slippage, as set out in Appendix 3 to the report, be noted.

Reason for recommendations

(1-4) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

377 CAPITAL MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL TO 30TH JUNE 2024 (DLS) –

The report provided an update on the progress of the Capital Programme for the period 1st April to 30th June, 2024. Details by scheme were shown in Appendix 1.

Appendix 2 to the report provided a summary of the position of the Capital Programme by Directorate from approval at Council on 6th March, 2024 through to 30th June, 2024, including any changes requested within the report.

The report set out any requested changes to the 2024/25 and future years' Capital Programme.

The report noted the current approved Programme of £139.927m.

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.

Having considered the report it was

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the progress made on delivering the 2024/25 Capital Programme within the remit of the Committee, in the attached Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.

(2) T H A T the use of Delegated Authority within the remit of the Committee, summarised in paragraph 2.6 and detailed in the report at paragraphs 2.21, 2.22 and 2.23, be noted.

(3) T H A T the use of Emergency Powers within the remit of the Committee, detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.

(4) 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 to 2.5 and detailed within the body of the report from paragraph 2.13, be noted.

Reason for recommendations

(1-4) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

378 ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN MONITORING REPORT: QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE 2024/25 (DLS) –

The performance report presented the Council's progress at Quarter 1 (Q1) (1st April to 30th June, 2024) towards achieving its Annual Delivery Plan (2024/25) commitments as aligned to its Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives.

Due to current capacity challenges within the Corporate Strategy and Insight Team, the format for this quarter's (Q1) Annual Delivery Plan Monitoring Report had been revised temporarily, to enable the Council to continue to provide Elected Members with an overview of progress in delivering its Annual Delivery Plan commitments as aligned to the remit of each Scrutiny Committee.

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 as aligned to the remit of the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee.

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.

Councillor N. Marshallsea queried why the attendance rate at Llantwit Major School was low, given that issues at Pencoedre were well known. In reply, the Senior Corporate Performance Partner, advised that attendance at Llantwit Major was on the radar of the Directorate's Management Team. The Director added that the Scrutiny Committee had previously requested a report regarding school attendance, and that report would detail particular areas of challenge, so there were efforts to ensure continued effective monitoring of primary and secondary school pupil attendance.

Councillor S. Haines commented that he felt the report needed to include detail around making schools a safe working place for teachers, particularly following issues that had been occurring at Pencoedre. The Director advised that the Council was developing opportunity for its staff and pupils to be able to report any concerns. Those concerns would be closely monitored, and information collated at a local authority level to identify any trends before they may become issues. The Director assured the Committee that there was a concerted effort to support the wellbeing of staff and highlighted the development of the Council's strategy to support the emotional wellbeing and mental health of pupils for all schools across the Vale including staff. There were measures to promote the strategy and to sign post to external support providers on top of the support provided in house.

Councillor E.J. Goodjohn queried if a Head of Special Needs had been appointed. The Director advised that the closing date for applications had been earlier that week.

Councillor H. Payne queried if there had been progress with the tender for St. Richard Gwyn build programme. In reply, the Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources advised that good progress had been made, and a report on that was due to be presented to the Scrutiny Committee.

Subsequently, the Committee

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T Quarter 1 performance results and progress towards achieving Annual Delivery Plan 2024/25 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 comments made by the Committee be referred to Cabinet, for their consideration, including:

- That efforts be made to ensure continued effective monitoring of primary and secondary school pupil attendance, as referred to under 'Emerging Areas of Concern' under Objective 2, in Appendix A to the report.
- That the Annual Delivery Plan Monitoring Report should detail the efforts to ensure that schools were a safe working place for teachers and the support provided to them.

Reasons for recommendations

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

(2) For the consideration of Cabinet.