

No.

LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting held on 11th March, 2021.

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

Present: Councillor S.J. Griffiths (Chairman); Councillor Ms. R.M. Birch (Vice-Chairman); Councillors N.P. Hodges, T.H. Jarvie, G.C Kemp, Mrs. J.M. Norman, A.C. Parker, Mrs. S.D. Perkes, L.O. Rowlands and N.C. Thomas.

Co-opted Members: Dr. M. Price (Roman Catholic Church) and Mrs. J. Lynch-Wilson (Parent Governor – Primary Sector).

Also present: Councillors L. Burnett (Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration), K.F. McCaffer (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Arts and Culture) and E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Legal, Regulatory and Planning Services).

484 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Mr. H. Gapper (Welsh-medium Education),

485 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Chairman read the following statement:

“May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing.”.

486 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 11th February, 2021 be approved as a correct record.

487 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

488 ANNUAL EQUALITY MONITORING REPORT 2019-20 (REF) –

Cabinet, on 22nd February, 2021 had noted the report and referred it to the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee for consideration. The Head of Policy and Business Transformation presented the report which advised of the Council’s progress against the equality objectives of the Strategic Equality Plan 2016 - 2020 and other actions taken to improve equality for people living and working in the Vale of Glamorgan.

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The report also summarised what Services had done to collect and analyse equality data on how people with protected characteristics had used their services, and noted what they have done to make improvements in the reporting period 2019 - 2020. In addition, the report provided commentary regarding the progress that had been made with each of the equality objectives and where the Council needed to continue to focus its efforts.

In response to a query raised regarding concerns which had been recently considered by Committee relating to female participation rates in sports activities at school, the Director of Learning and Skills advised that colleagues in Leisure and Sport would usually undertake a survey which considered this issue, however this work had not been carried out during the current year due to COVID-related school closures. The Director assured Members that as soon as normal operations resumed the situation would be monitored.

There being no further queries from Members it was subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the Annual Equality Monitoring Report be noted.

Reasons for recommendations

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

489 SERVICE PLANS AND TARGET SETTING TO DELIVER THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN (IMPROVEMENT PLAN PART 1) 2021/22 (DLS) –

The report presented the service plans and targets within the remit of the Scrutiny Committee. These set out the specific areas of focus associated with the delivery of the Council's Annual Delivery Plan (Improvement Plan Part 1) for 2021/2022 as aligned to its four Corporate Plan Well-being (Improvement). All scrutiny Committees considered a draft ADP in December 2020 and their views alongside that of other key stakeholders had informed the final Plan, set for approval by Cabinet on 8th March, 2021.

The commitments in the ADP were reflected in the Service Plans, attached at Appendix A to the report, together with proposed service improvement targets, which were attached at Appendix B to the report, to show how individual service areas would contribute to their achievement and overall delivery of the Council's four Well-being Objectives.

A number of Members raised concerns regarding how the Council would carry out benchmarking in order to ensure that pupils whose educational attainment had slipped while not attending school would be able to catch up, and what support and interventions would be in place to assist schools and pupils. In response, Officers advised of the following:

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- Schools were developing individual strategies to support pupils who they had identified as being vulnerable or in need of additional support. As such, there was no 'one size fits all' approach, although the Local Authority would be supporting schools alongside their Improvement Partners in delivering their strategies. Welsh Government had made funding available through an Accelerating Learning Programme called Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards (RRRS) in order to support schools in this.
- The Directorate would need to consider how it approached reporting progress on this matter as it was no longer clear what data could be utilised to monitor attainment, with schools no longer obliged to share their test results with the Local Authority. The Central South Consortium (CSC) would be consulted regarding this. It was unfortunate that COVID-19 had coincided with the amendments to the accountability framework which had caused the changes to what attainment data was available to the Local Authority, and a report regarding these changes would be brought to Committee in due course. However, while monitoring the situation at a pupil level might not be possible, the Local Authority would be receiving reports from Improvement Partners assessing the level of support required by each school.
- At the Vice-Chairman's request, Officers would be reporting to Committee in due course the outcomes of the Children's Commissioner for Wales' report, 'Coronavirus and Me', which focused on children's wellbeing. Moreover, it was suggested that phrases such as 'catch up' be avoided as learners may feel additional pressure, or that they weren't at a level they should be.
- Following the return of Foundation Phase pupils to school, anecdotal reports indicated that pupils were doing well with no negative feedback having been received by the Head of Standards and Provision.
- Anecdotal reports also indicated that changes to exam arrangements had not negatively impacted Vale of Glamorgan pupils in obtaining offers of places at University.
- Throughout the pandemic schools had already been working to identify and support those pupils who were most vulnerable.
- In working remotely, school staff had been required to upskill in terms of their use of digital technology at a record pace, demonstrating many examples of good practice, and it would be interesting to see how this might dovetail with the supporting of learning going forward.

Members also praised how comprehensive the report was and the work of the Officers involved, and having fully considered the report it was subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the Service Plans (Appendix A to the report) be endorsed via recommendation to Cabinet and all planned activities as they relate to the remit of this Committee (Appendix C) be agreed.

(2) T H A T the proposed service improvement targets for 2021/2022 (Appendix B to the report) relating to the remit of this Committee be agreed and endorsed.

Reasons for recommendations

(1) To ensure that the Service Plans aligned to this Committee's remit were accurate, up to date and relevant and became the main document through which performance against the Corporate Plan's Annual Delivery Plan was monitored and measured during 2021/2022.

(2) To ensure the Council's Corporate Plan Performance Measurement Framework identified a relevant set of performance measures and targets against which the Annual Delivery Plan could be monitored and measured during 2021/2022 in line with requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

490 ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN MONITORING REPORT: QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE 2021/22 (DLS) –

The performance report presented the Council's progress at Quarter 3 (1st April to 31st December, 2020) towards achieving the Council's Annual Delivery Plan (2020/21) (ADP) commitments as aligned to the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives. Appendix A to the report summarised how the Council overall was performing against each of its Well-being Objectives, while Appendix B to the report provided a summary which was specific to the remit of the Committee.

Despite the ongoing challenges of responding to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Council had made positive progress in delivering its in-year commitments in relation to its ADP. This performance had contributed to an overall Amber status for the Plan at Quarter 3 (Q3).

Progress made against the 61 actions and 7 quarterly measures which were specifically within the remit of the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee could be summarised as follows:

- GREEN: 43 actions (71%) and 3 measures.
- AMBER: 8 actions (13%) and 1 measures.
- RED: 10 actions (16%) and 3 measures.

Of the 10 actions attributed a Red performance status, the impact of COVID-19 was identified as a contributory factor in the reported slippage for 9 actions, and in relation to the 3 measures attributed a Red status, the impact of COVID-19 had contributed to missing the target. Progress in relation to Coronavirus recovery was also reported to Members with the Officer highlighting issues pertinent to the Committee's remit.

In response to a query raised regarding whether there had been consideration given to supporting continuation of evening classes in adult education, particularly with regard to their benefits for the mental health of participants, the Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources advised of the following:

No.

- The Local Authority had been tackling digital exclusion in Adult Community Learning (ACL), with funding having been secured which allowed the loaning of devices through local libraries. As a result it was now easier to deliver courses on a broader range of topics, for instance engineering, 3D Printing and Music Creation, due to the increased availability of necessary tools to adult learners which they could access at their leisure through libraries, many of which would potentially be moving to longer opening hours.
- Programmes were being run which supported people with dementia through the use of Arts.

In response to a further query, the Officer clarified that the Council offered European Computer Driving License (ECDL) courses to adult learners in order to ensure that they were not only able to access digital devices but that they were also supported in being able to use the devices to the best of their abilities.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration, with permission to speak, wished to pay tribute to all staff within the Learning and Skills Directorate for their work, and highlighted that many may not be aware of the level of outcomes delivered, with many staff members having been repurposed or called upon to undertake additional work in order to meet the needs of their own and other service areas as a result of the pandemic. Members agreed that they endorsed the Cabinet Member's statement of thanks to staff, noting that during an unpredictable time Officers had been working hard to support the Education Authority and were always prepared to address Members' queries when needed.

There being no further queries it was subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the performance results and progress towards achieving the Annual Delivery Plan 2020/21 commitments as aligned to the Council's 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 under-performance and to tackle the key challenges identified within the remit of the Committee be noted.

(3) T H A T the progress being made through the Council's recovery strategy and Directorate Recovery Plans in response to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic be noted.

Reasons for recommendations

(1) To ensure the Council clearly demonstrated the progress being made towards achieving its commitments in the Annual Delivery Plan 2020/21 aimed at making a positive difference to the lives of Vale of Glamorgan citizens.

(2) To ensure the Council was effectively assessing its performance in line with the requirement to secure continuous improvement outlined in the Local Government Measure (Wales) 2009 and reflecting the requirement of the Well-being of Future

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Generations (Wales) Act 2015 that it maximised its contribution to achieving the wellbeing goals for Wales.

(3) To ensure members maintained an oversight of the recovery issues impacting on the work of the Council and their respective Scrutiny Committees.

491 YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND PROGRESSION UPDATE (DLS) –

The report sought to enhance Members' awareness of the reduction of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in the Vale of Glamorgan, and consisted of annual destination data of school leavers carried out by Careers Wales on behalf of Welsh Government in October 2019 and October 2020.

The October 2020 annual destination Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics (Wales) highlighted the level of young people NEET had reduced in years 11 and 12 to 0.89% and 0.62% respectively, and increased in Year 13 to 3.10%. The Welsh average would be made available in May 2021 when the official data was published for each year group.

The reduction of young people NEET in the Vale had been as a result of access to a range of alternative education provision contracted through the Local Authority, European Social Fund projects and strategic partnership working, for instance the Inspire 2 Achieve (I2A) and Inspire 2 Work (I2W) programmes.

Members commended the work undertaken by Officers and what had been achieved by young people NEET, noting that the statistics provided within the report were impressive, particularly within the current circumstances. In response to a query regarding whether there were further options available for those NEET who left their programmes early, the Senior Youth Manager advised that:

- Any early leavers from the I2A pre-16 programme were immediately picked up by Careers Wales and the Council was therefore engaged with them regarding any young leavers that were of concern.
- Additional funding had been secured to extend the I2A and I2W programmes until December 2022.
- The service was in discussion with colleges and ACT regarding options over the summer which would assist young leavers to transition post-COVID and ensure none fell into the NEET bracket.
- Additional pre and post-16 training had been assigned with ACL, Communities for Work Plus, the Department of Work and Pensions and Careers Wales with the aim of ensuring that consistent routes of progression were available for individuals dropping out.

Having fully considered the report it was subsequently

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RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the progress made in the last 12 months of the implementation of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) to reduce the number of young people NEET in the Vale of Glamorgan be noted.
- (2) T H A T the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee receive a further progress update report in 12 months.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) The Council had a strategic responsibility for implementing the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) to reduce the number of young people Not in Education Employment or Training.
- (2) In order that the Scrutiny Committee had continued oversight of the YEPF.

492 REVENUE AND CAPITAL MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL 2020 TO 31ST JANUARY 2021 (DLS) –

The Principal Accountant presented the report which advised Committee of the progress relating to revenue and capital expenditure for the period 1st April to 31st January, 2021.

With regard to revenue, Committee had previously been advised that it was possible that total school deficit balances may exceed total school positive balances, and the Officer confirmed this was an area that remained under review.

The report detailed that the main source of pressure related to education transport, with transport for Additional Learning Needs (ALN) pupils and Secondary transport being major contributors, however the Officer noted that the Final Revenue Budget did award some additional funding in this budget area, and that were also underspends across the service to offset this pressure. An efficiency target for the year has been set at £45k with no savings target set for schools, and this was on target to be achieved in full by year end as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

The currently approved capital budget had been set at £54.311m. Appendix 2 to the report detailed financial progress on the Capital Programme as at 31st January, 2021, and Members were advised of changes which had been made to the Programme since the last report to Committee.

Having fully considered the report it was subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the position with regard to the 2020/21 revenue and capital budgets be noted.

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Reason for recommendation

In order that Members were aware of the projected revenue and capital outturn for 2020/21.