

LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 16th September, 2021.

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

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

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

Co-opted Members: Dr. M. Price (Roman Catholic Church) and I. Cramb (Vale Youth Forum).

Also present: Councillors N. Moore (Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources) and L. Burnett (Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration).

347 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from H. Gapper (Welsh Medium Education).

348 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 8th July, 2021 and the Special meeting held on 22nd July, 2021 be approved as a correct record.

349 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations were received.

350 PRESENTATION: BIG FRESH CATERING COMPANY –

The Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources provided a PowerPoint presentation on the Big Fresh Catering Company. He was joined by the Company's Managing Director. The presentation covered the following:

- Background to the project's commencement in 2015.
- Priorities.
- Governance and Board structure.
- Business Planning and learning new business activities.
- The culture within the Big Fresh Catering Company.
- Engagement activities.
- Impact of Covid and some of the changes such as the introduction of a voucher system.

- Staff development and support.
- Penarth Pavilion Café.
- Financial outturn and sales for the period 26th March to 31st August 2021.
- Value added from the new way of operating such as:
 - the creation of 20 new jobs since September 2019
 - new menus to reflect new legislation (Natasha's Law)
 - Engagement programmes with pupils and parents
 - Increased expenditure on ingredients and options
- The Company's investment programme including
 - £255k cash pay-out to schools raised through the Company's profit
 - £60k for community projects
 - £5k to the Good Citizens Fund
 - £88k for the purchase of better-quality ingredients
 - £113k for operations and development
- A run through of the projects funded such as Wellbeing Hubs and Afterschool Enrichment Clubs.
- School based priorities such as Cashless Catering and new menus.
- The Company's Mission Statement.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration, with permission to speak, praised the staff for a phenomenal achievement and commented on the huge success that the Penarth Pavilion café had been. She added that Audit Wales had visited the café and commented that the catering project was something that should be shared with other local authorities across Wales. The Cabinet Member also stated that there was no budget deficit within the catering service, only a surplus, and the benefit of this was being passed onto schools.

Councillor N.C. Thomas thanked staff for their efforts and for the success of the project. He agreed that as this was a new way of working that this model should be shared and adopted in other parts of Wales.

Councillor S.D. Perkes queried whether there were plans for the company to expand to other parts of the Vale. She also queried whether the company provided opportunities for pupils to undertake work experience. In reply, the Managing Director for the Big Fresh Catering Company stated that there was a desire to expand, but the terms of legal agreement meant that at present the Company could only trade 20% of the total school meals proceeds. It was hoped that the Company's business model could be changed in order for it to trade more and look for further commercial opportunities.

With regard to work experience, the Committee was advised that opportunities were provided, for example, Pencoedtre High School offered a scheme for some of its pupils.

Overall, the Committee was keen to express its thanks and gratitude to all the staff involved.

The Committee

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the contents of the presentation be noted and thanks passed onto the staff.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the presentation and discussions at the meeting and to pass on the Committee's thanks and appreciation for all the hard work of the staff.

351 ANNUAL CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING REPORT 2020/21 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 7th June, 2021 as contained within the agenda was presented to the Scrutiny Committee. The Annual Report 2020/21 provided an overview of the Corporate Safeguarding activities taking place across the Local Authority.

The Scrutiny Committee, having considered the reference and report and all the implications contained therein, subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the contents of the report be noted.
- (2) T H A T the Committee's congratulations be passed on to staff for all the work undertaken.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Following consideration of the Corporate Safeguarding report.
- (2) In recognition of the hard work and dedication of the staff.

352 THE USE AND IMPACT OF THE PUPIL DEVELOPMENT GRANT IN VALE OF GLAMORGAN SCHOOLS (DLS) –

The Principal Improvement Partner (Central South Consortium) presented the report which summarised the findings of discussions held between improvement partners from the Central South Consortium and school leaders in the Vale of Glamorgan regarding the use and impact of the Pupil Development Grant (PDG).

The report outlined discussions undertaken with school leaders on:

- how the grant was used in schools;
- how schools were monitoring the impact of the grant;
- the sustainability of initiatives supported by the grant;

- professional learning linked to the grant;
- adaptations made to the grant during the 2020-21 academic year;
- impact on pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM);
- main concerns regarding eFSM pupils following lockdown and how schools planned to address those concerns.

The report also included a number of cameos that exemplified how schools in the Vale of Glamorgan were making use of the PDG grant and its impact on learners.

For this item the Committee also welcomed Mr J. Welch the Strategic Lead for Equity and Wellbeing (Central South Consortium), Mr L. Humphreys, Headteacher Pencoedtre High School, Dr. V. Browne (Executive Headteacher for Whitmore and Pencoedtre High Schools), Mrs. J. Hayward, Executive Headteacher Cadoxton and Oakfield Primary Schools and Mrs R. Milton, Cadoxton Primary School.

Mrs. Hayward and Mr. Humphreys were invited to provide examples of the use and impact of the PDG at Cadoxton and Oakfield Primary Schools and also Pencoedtre High School. The key points being:

- The grant money would be used to support learners to improve speech and language, reading, reduce costs of trips, provide financial assistance with school uniforms, help pay for meals and to assist with meeting the emotional wellbeing needs of pupils.
- PDG was used to finance the employment of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) who would work with children requiring additional support.
- An important aspect of the work of LSAs revolved around the Trauma Informed Approach to learning to support those children who had suffered because of past events.
- The PDG was used to ensure that the curriculum was exciting for children so that they would be encouraged to learn and attend school.
- PDG monies enabled schools to meet the emotional needs of children by introducing activities or projects which would make coming to school more fun. This included the funding of residential trips which would provide pupils with opportunities and experiences that they would not normally be able to have.
- Financial assistance was provided to enhance Digital opportunities.
- The PDG allowed schools to have a community focus which enabled there to be work with families to help with pupil's wellbeing, nutrition and behaviour. This work would also include the signposting of families to other support networks such as the Credit Union.
- Extending the school day to provide out of hours learning and activities was considered an important way to provide opportunities for pupils from a less well-off background.
- PDG allowed schools to adopt a forward-thinking approach to learning. For example, Oakfield Primary School had created a shop & share center which provided support around cooking and meeting dietary requirements.
- In terms of reducing the barriers for attendance this enabled training opportunities for staff and helped ensure that pupils felt safe when coming to school.

Councillor N.C. Thomas referred to challenges relating to pupils with low attendance and queried whether pupils had been keen to return to school after a long period off due to Covid. In reply, Mr. Humphreys stated that the general view was that pupils of Pencoedtre High School couldn't wait to get back to physically attending school. He added that this did not mean that there were not many challenges with pupils undertaking more home working, such as not having a desk or the family life around them. Mrs. Hayward agreed with these comments and stated that on the whole pupils were delighted to return to school, but for some a mix of home working and going to school was their preference. This led to schools questioning how a school day should be structured. The Covid period also allowed schools to reflect on ways to engage with parents, so better electronic methods were now more common such as social media and the Seesaw website. This had led to the breaking down of some barriers. Further to these points, Mr. Welch referred to attendance still being an issue and the challenges around returning to school and adopting a more blended learning package and home working. Therefore, the work of Family Engagement Officers was critical. Mrs. Hayward added that the job description of her schools Family Engagement Officer had been developed to better reflect current challenges and the skill set required to meet those challenges.

Councillor S.D. Perkes queried whether the means of communication with parents developed during the Covid pandemic would be maintained and continue. Mrs. Hayward confirmed that they would, but the challenge was to build on them to identify the best way to communicate with each set of parents in order for them to better engage with teachers.

Councillor Perkes also queried how would eFSM pupils be supported to improve after they had left school. In reply, Dr. Browne stated that in his opinion there need to be a change in the way that children were assessed particularly around examinations as these did not bring out the best in all students. Schools also needed to break down barriers to learning to better respond to the individual needs of pupils. This was the main reason behind the extended school day and for more out of hours school activities to enhance the experiences and opportunities for eFSM pupils. This would lead to better use of a school's environment and facilities.

Councillor R.M. Birch commented on the role of teachers, with an ever-greater emphasis on being a social worker. She was therefore amazed at the amount of work carried out by staff to ensure pupils had a regulated and steady school experience, but she felt that this would lead to the need to rewrite teachers' job descriptions. The public would not always recognise the commitment of school staff, so she paid tribute to their hard work and dedication. In response to these comments, Mr. Welch agreed that there would need to be a change in the ways teachers were prepared for the challenges that were ahead of them. He referred to the whole community school approach that was growing but which should lead to better engagement with parents. He added that there were discussions within Welsh Government about the removal of the PDG. The Central South Consortium was therefore trying to get the message to the Welsh Government about how valued the PDG was, and what a big impact there would be to schools if it was taken away.

There be no further comments or queries, the Committee

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the findings of the report regarding the use and impact of the Pupil Development Grant in Vale of Glamorgan schools, be noted.
- (2) T H A T the support provided by schools to pupils eligible to free school meals and how this continues to be adapted in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, be recognised.
- (3) T H A T all schools in the Vale of Glamorgan be commended for all the support and assistance given to pupils and parents during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) In recognising the universal and targeted support the Local Authority and schools have provided for pupils eligible for free school meals, and how provision has been adapted during the pandemic.
- (3) To commend all schools in the Vale of Glamorgan for the support and assistance provided to pupils and parents during the Covid-19 pandemic.

353 ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION UPDATE (DLS) –

The Inclusion Manager presented the report which outlined that the Vale of Glamorgan (VoG) like all Local Authorities (LAs) had longstanding obligations to ensure that all children of school age received a suitable and full-time education at school or otherwise.

The VoG, along with nearly all LAs in Wales, had seen significant increases in the number of parents choosing to home educate in recent years. Comparative data was limited and restricted in its use. The VoG Elective Home Education (EHE) data below shows an ongoing increase over time which has subsequently continued to rise even since schools re-opened in April 2021.

January 2018	January 2019	January 2020	January 2021
46 EHE known to the LA	76 EHE known to the LA	87 EHE known to the LA	104 EHE known to the LA

EHE numbers in the Vale of Glamorgan based on the census date of 26th January 2021 were 104 compared to 87 the year before, but this 20% increase was a significantly lower rate than that experienced by many LAs in Wales; the average increase across Wales was 36%. The rate per 1,000 pupils in the Vale increased

from 4.5 in 2020 to 5.3 in 2021 which compared to a Wales average increase from 7 to 9.5. The Vale's rate per 1,000 pupils was the joint lowest in Wales.

In line with the Welsh Government's (WG) increasing focus on EHE, the increasing complexity of EHE learner needs (e.g. ALN needs) and expectations by way of support for EHE under the WG grant, the LA had changed its delivery and management of services relating to EHE. The provision of services relating to EHE now sat within the Inclusion team who provided EHE support and oversight for the LA.

EHE was a legal option for parents to choose, provided that they were able to satisfy the LA (or the courts if they opted not to engage with the LA) that the education provided was suitable, efficient and full time. The right to home educate was not a fundamental one and was conditional on parents providing their child with an 'efficient' and 'suitable' education. Parents may educate their child at home provided they fulfilled certain legal requirements as the law currently stood.

WG had published revised draft statutory guidance on EHE which made clearer the broader expectations on LAs to monitor and support the provision of EHE. WG had also published draft regulations for consultation which, if enacted, placed a duty on LAs to make arrangements to establish the identities of children in their area who were not registered learners at a school and who were not receiving suitable education. The regulations, if enacted, would require LAs to maintain and populate a database, Children Missing Education (CME), which would lead to increased obligations upon all Welsh LAs to maintain a reasonably accurate database of all learners living in the VoG who were of school age.

Neither schools nor LA officers or other professionals should encourage a parent to elect to home educate as it should be a positive choice by the parent. Where there were negative reasons for the decision, officers could, and did seek to advocate for and mediate between learners, parents and schools to establish if any concerns could be addressed to enable the learner to stay on roll.

In cases where the EHE provision was deemed to be unsuitable, the Inclusion Team would work with parents and other agencies to ascertain next 'best steps' in the interests of the child. This may lead to the issue of School Attendance Order (SAO) proceedings whereby the court would be invited to require learners to attend a named school if the parent was unable to evidence suitable education was being provided.

Potential future changes to WG policy and legislation in relation to EHE and CME and the impact of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (ALNET) was likely to continue to increase the expectations of LAs in relation to the delivery of services and support for EHE learners.

In line with the WG's increasing focus on EHE, the increasing complexity of EHE learner needs (e.g. ALN needs) and expectations by way of support for EHE under the WG grant, the LA had changed its delivery and management of services relating to EHE. The provision of services relating to EHE now sat within the Inclusion Team who provided EHE support and oversight for the LA.

Councillor N.C. Thomas referred to the relatively small increase in families electing to home school in the Vale when compared to other parts of Wales. He queried whether this reflected the quality of schools in the Vale and whether there was any information on why families elected to home school. In reply, the Inclusion Manager stated that during home visits parents would be asked why they chose to home school which was usually down to parental choice. In addition, Headteachers were required to complete a form before any pupil was removed from the school roll. Data gathered from this was used for comparison purposes and then information shared with Headteachers if parents raised any concerns. In relation to this query, the Head of Standards and Provision referred to the successful engagement with parents who would be made aware that there was no automatic right for their child to be reinstated back into the school of choice.

Having considered the report, Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the progress made in the Elective Home Education (EHE) service during the last 12 Months be noted.
- (2) T H A T the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee receives a further progress update report in 12 months in relation to the ongoing delivery, and further measures to raise awareness of the use and impact of EHE grants for the support of EHE learners.
- (3) T H A T the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee, in receiving the report referred to in Recommendation (2) above, be updated on the further progress as to the likely impact of any implementation of the proposed amended statutory guidance on Home Education and the proposed draft regulations which incorporate the requirement for Local Authorities to maintain a Children Missing Education (CME) database.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) To further update Scrutiny Committee as to the progress made in relation to the ongoing delivery, and further awareness raising of the use and impact of the EHE grants for the support of EHE learners.
- (3) To ensure that Members of the Scrutiny Committee continue to have oversight and awareness of ongoing changes to the expectations and obligations placed on the Local Authority in regard to EHE learners and learners who may be categorised as CME and missing their entitlement to an education.

354 EDUCATION UPDATE ON THE SYRIAN RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME (DLS) –

The Vulnerable Groups Manager presented the report which advised that the Vale of Glamorgan (VoG), like all Local Authorities (LAs), had a longstanding obligation to ensure that all children of school age received a suitable and full-time education at school or otherwise, including those who were part of the Syrian Resettlement Programme (SRP).

This year the Welsh Government (WG) Minority Ethnic Achievement and Gypsy, Roma Traveller (MEAGRT) grant was again being provided to all LAs and the VoG would continue to provide and create specialised support and resources for SRP learners.

The Vulnerable Groups Team (VGT) had improved support for learners in the SRP over the last 12 months by providing targeted support and assistance for schools to access additional funding from the Home Office.

Since the start of the SRP in April 2016, the Vale had welcomed 15 families in total: 11 families with children of school age and four families with children under school age. One family had been resettled under the Community Sponsorship Programme called Croeso Penarth. The VGT are also liaising with the SRP Resettlement Coordinator and Croeso Cowbridge in relation to a new family in 2021 due to arrive in Autumn 2021.

On arrival, the learners endeavour to adjust to the new schools in challenging circumstances. To facilitate this, the VGT liaises with class teachers and other school staff to discuss on-going academic, social, and emotional support to meet the needs of each pupil, along with their families and agree a way forward.

Targeted learners from the SRP in the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 had been directly supported by the VGT. This support had involved extensive literacy, including English language interventions (reading via WhatsApp, FaceTime and 'Giglets' online literacy resource) during Covid 19 restrictions to ensure the continued literacy progress of the learners.

All targeted learners from the SRP retained their National Curriculum levels and reading levels to those prior to the Covid 19 restrictions. The acquisition of English language improved for all targeted SRP learners within the New to English competency stage. Targeted learners from the SRP in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 received continued support during Covid 19 restrictions, directly and in real time via Google classroom. All targeted SRP learners in KS3 and KS4 improved their reading accuracy and comprehension age by at least 12 months (baseline YARC assessments September 2019 and reassessed September 2020).

Two SRP learners in Year 10 had achieved GCSE outcomes in 2020.

Committee, having considered the report, consequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the progress made in the education remit of Syrian Resettlement Programme (SRP) in the last 12 months be noted.
- (2) T H A T Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee receives a further progress update report in 12 months as to ongoing delivery, further raising awareness of the use and impact of Minority Ethnic Achievement and Gypsy, Roma Traveller (MEAGRT) funding grants for the support of SRP learners.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) To ensure that Members of the Scrutiny Committee continue to have oversight and awareness of ongoing expectations placed on the Local Authority regarding SRP learners.

355 ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN MONITORING REPORT: QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE 2021/22 (DLS) –

The performance report presented the Council's progress at Quarter 1 (1st April to 30th June 2021) towards achieving its Annual Delivery Plan (2021/22) commitments as aligned to the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives.

The Council had made positive progress in delivering its in-year commitments in relation to its Annual Delivery Plan (2021/22). This performance had contributed to an overall Green status for the Plan at Quarter 1 (Q1).

All four Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives were attributed a Green performance status at Q1 to reflect the progress made to date. This was positive given the ongoing challenges arising from the pandemic.

97% (306 out of 315) of planned activities outlined in the Council's Annual Delivery Plan had been attributed a Green performance reflecting the positive progress made during the quarter, 1% (2) an Amber status and 2% (7) of planned activities were attributed a Red status.

Of the 7 actions attributed a Red performance status during the quarter, 29% (2) were directly as a result of service reprioritisation measures undertaken in response to the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In relation to these areas, where appropriate, work was now recommencing as part of the Council's recovery plans and strategy. Progress in relation to Coronavirus recovery was being reported to Members in the presentation accompanying the performance report at Scrutiny Committee and focused on highlighting issues pertinent to the Committee's remit. This Coronavirus recovery update formed part of quarterly performance reporting to

ensure Members maintained an oversight of the recovery issues impacting on the work of their respective Committees. From this perspective, Members were requested to note the progress to date in relation to Coronavirus recovery.

Of the 42 quarterly performance measures aligned to the Council's Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives, data was reported for 34 measures where a performance status was applicable. 50% (17) measures were attributed a Green performance Status, 17% (6) an Amber status and 33% (11) a Red status. Data was unavailable for 8 quarterly measures due to reprioritisation measures undertaken in response to the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. A performance status was not applicable for 107 measures including a number of annual indicators (89) and those establishing baseline performance for the year (18).

In relation to the 11 measures attributed a Red performance status during the quarter, the impact of COVID-19 had contributed to 54% (6) missing target.

In relation to the planned activities within the remit of the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee, 100% (100 out of 100) were attributed a Green performance status. Of the 4 quarterly measures reported, 40% (2) were attributed a Green performance status and 60% (3) were attributed Red status. In relation to the 3 measures attributed a Red status, the impact of COVID-19 had contributed to missing the target.

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.

Committee, having considered the report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the performance results and progress towards achieving the Annual Delivery Plan 2021/22 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 remedial actions to be taken to address areas of underperformance 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&2) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (3) To ensure Members maintain an oversight of the recovery issues impacting on the work of the Council and their respective Scrutiny Committee.