

LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 15th June, 2023.

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, W. Gilligan, E.J. Goodjohn, W.A. Hennessy; N.P. Hodges, J. Lynch Wilson, N. Marshallsea, J.M. Norman and E. Penn.

Co-Opted Members: L. Barrowclough (Parent Governor – Primary Sector), R. Morteo (Church in Wales) and Dr. M. Price (Roman Catholic Church), G. van der Burgt (Parent Governor – Secondary Sector); A. Emmerson and R. Goodjohn (Vale Youth Forum).

Also present: Councillors R.M. Birch (Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language), C.M. Cowpe, C.P. Franks, E. Goodjohn and E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health).

122 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.”

123 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 18th May, 2023 be approved as a correct record subject to it being noted that Councillor Dr. I.J. Johnson was also present at the meeting.

124 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor W.A. Hennessy declared an interest in Agenda Item 5 (School Funding) as he was part of the Management Committee of the Vale School Governors Association, and withdrew for the item.

Councillor J. Lynch Wilson declared an interest in Agenda Item 5 (School Funding) as she was a Member of the Vale School Governors Association and withdrew for the item.

Councillor N. Marshallsea declared an interest in Agenda Item 5 (School Funding) Recommendation (2) as she worked for Jane Hutt MS and so she did not take part in the debate on this recommendation.

G. van der Burgt (Co-opted Member) declared an interest in Agenda Item 5 (School Funding) as she was a Member of the Vale School Governors Association and withdrew for the item.

L. Barrowclough (Co-opted Member) declared an interest in Agenda Item 5 (School Funding) as she was a Member of the Vale School Governors Association and withdrew for the item.

Dr. M. Price (Co-opted Member) declared an interest in Agenda Item 5 (School Funding) as he was Chair of the Vale School Governors Association. As he was presenting the item he withdrew for the formal debate, following questions and points of clarification.

125 EDUCATION FUNDING (DLS) –

The report was requested to be written and brought to Committee by the Chair and was presented by the Head of Finance.

The purpose of the report was to provide an update on how schools were funded and the potential challenges this presented to schools in the Vale of Glamorgan at an individual level for 2023/24 and for the medium term.

Local Authorities were funded by a combination of:

- Council Tax;
- General Government Grant, known as Aggregate External Finance (AEF) which comprised Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and redistributed National Non Domestic Rates;
- Specific Grants; and
- Fees and Charges.

The framework which had been in place since 2001 used a series of service blocks known as Standard Spending Assessments to measure need to distribute resources across the 22 Councils in Wales. The Vale of Glamorgan did not fare well in this approach and had the second lowest grant per capita of the 22 Councils. In relation to the funding available for schools, this impacted on funding at a school level with spending per pupil in Vale's schools at £299 less than the Welsh average.

The Council had the second highest level of delegation of resources to schools and when the full funding for schools was considered, including Central Costs, the Vale of Glamorgan was actually the lowest funded and £728 per pupil below the Wales average. The Vale of Glamorgan received the third highest increase in AEF across Wales in the March settlement. The Settlement represented a significant increase on the 3.5% which was the year 2 increase in the 2023/24

Settlement and the basis of the Council's initial forecast. It was also an improvement on the 7% increase anticipated after the Chancellor's budget last October. Welsh Government had clearly directed more resources than were available from the Barnett formula consequential to address funding pressures in Local Authorities.

The Council spent in excess of notional sums in the grant settlement from Welsh Government and had exceeded this still further for 2023/24. The Council was in the process of closing the accounts for 2022/23 and early provisional projections had identified that school balances had fallen by £6m as at 31st March, 2023. The deadline for agreement of individual school budgets for 2023/24 was 30th June and this work was ongoing.

A workshop for the Committee and other representatives was being planned for early July which would enable further exploration of the issues covered in the report and there would be a follow up report in September when the full picture on school budgets for 2023/24 would be clearer.

Following the presentation of the report, in response to a query from the Vice-Chair, the Operational Manager for Accountancy advised that the Vale of Glamorgan Council set an overall budget below the indicator set by the Welsh Government and that spending above the indicator in services such as Education was offset by below-indicator spending in other service areas.

In response to a query from Councillor Hodges, the Head of Finance advised that a number of Vale of Glamorgan schools had moved into a budget deficit while the 2023/24 budget was created. The Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources also advised that a number of schools were forecasting deficit budgets and were working, with support from officers, on developing recovery plans which, once finalised, could be reported on.

Councillor Penn and the Vice-Chair subsequently highlighted the inflationary pressures facing Vale of Glamorgan schools. In response, the Head of Finance advised that as both the teachers' and Local Government pay award negotiations were currently ongoing, further financial pressure in relation to these could be forthcoming.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources advised that there were mechanisms in place to support smaller and rural schools within the school funding formula, with enhancements for schools facing difficulties due to their location. The officer further advised that particular challenges for rural schools existed around their inaccessibility by public transport and the need to provide school transport services, the challenges around which had been previously reported to Committee.

In response to a further question from the Chair, the Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources advised that extensive conversations were taking place between the Council and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) around education funding generally, with the WLGA meeting with officers, Headteachers and the Vale School Governors Association to discuss the issues

faced. The officer further advised that a number of project groups had been subsequently set up around funding challenges and ALN needs in education, in order to share best practice.

The Director of Learning and Skills subsequently advised that the Council took every opportunity to raise its concerns regarding the funding formula and that it was acknowledged that the formula was outdated. The Director advised that they, along with the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and the Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language had met with the WLGA to outline concerns regarding the funding formula and to explore other mechanisms that could be used in lieu of changes to it. An example of this was introducing a floor to the funding provided, with the aim of levelling-out unevenness of funding levels across Local Authorities.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language subsequently advised that the Leader of the Council had met with the Welsh Government Minister for Education and Welsh Language on a number of occasions to discuss education funding, and that although this was an issue in every Local Authority across Wales, this would not prevent the Council from raising their concerns at every available opportunity.

With no further questions or comments, it was subsequently

RECOMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the contents of the report be noted
- (2) T H A T the proposals for the planned workshop to explore this issue in further detail be approved.
- (3) T H A T the Committee receives an update on the workshop and ideas to progress these issues as part of the forward work programme.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the content of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) In order that Committee Members can discuss the issues in more depth with key Officers and stakeholders and share ideas to progress the issue.
- (3) So that the Committee can be updated on the progress made following the workshop.

126 SCHOOL FUNDING –

The presentation was lead by the Chair of the Vale School Governors Association (VSGA), the Chair of Governors for Gwenfo Church in Wales Primary School and the Headteacher of Romilly Primary School, and advised Committee of the budgetary difficulties currently experienced by the schools involved.

Following the presentation, in response to a query from the Vice-Chair, the Chair of Governors for Gwenfo Primary School advised that children at the school were not currently suffering because one-to-one support for children who required it was being provided, but that it would be the case should that support not be available. The Chair of the VSGA further advised that supporting children's needs at Gwenfo Primary School was not possible without the school entering a deficit budget.

In response to a query from the Vice-Chair, the Headteacher of Romilly Primary School advised that it was important for teachers to be aware that Elected Members and the Committee were concerned about and discussing their wellbeing. The Headteacher further advised that they were concerned regarding the amount of Headteachers that currently wanted to leave the profession.

In response to a query from the Vice-Chair, the Director of Learning and Skills advised that whether changes to the funding formula would generate greater funding for education would depend on how the Council as a whole decided to allocate funding in the budget to all of its priorities. The Director further advised that the whole of the funding formula for Local Government would need to be considered in order for the Education section of the formula to be adjusted, and that officers could not predict how a change in the formula would impact the Council.

Councillor Hodges subsequently advised that in their view, the reduced funding of the Welsh Government by the UK Government was an additional key issue to that of the funding formula.

In response to a question from Chair, the Headteacher of Romilly Primary School and the Chair of Governors for Gwenfo Primary School advised that statutory duties were being met at the schools, but that this was at the expense of needing the budget deficits to increase at times.

Committee subsequently thanked all guests for an illuminating presentation and highlighted the alarming nature of the concerns raised by schools. Councillor Hodges subsequently moved that the Committee invite the Member of Parliament and Member of the Senedd for the Vale of Glamorgan to address the Committee on the funding arrangements and the current difficulties faced by schools, as discussed during the meeting. The Motion was seconded by Councillor Penn and was subsequently carried without dissent.

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the presentation be noted and representatives of The Vale School Governors Association and the schools be thanked for their time and contributions.
- (2) T H A T the MS and MP for the Vale of Glamorgan be invited to address the Committee regarding the issues raised regarding school finances and funding.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the content of the presentation and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) In order for Committee to be informed of what action was being taken by both the Welsh and UK Governments to address the financial issues faced by Vale of Glamorgan schools

127 VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL: ANNUAL PERFORMANCE CALENDAR 2023/24 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 25th May, 2023 was presented by the Director of Corporate Resources.

Following presentation of the report, in response to a suggestion from the Vice-Chair, the Director for Corporate Resources advised that officers could look to build the perspectives of other sections of the Council's staff into its peer assessment process.

In response to a query from the Chair, the Director of Corporate Resources advised that based on their experience of peer challenge sessions, the process had been a useful and valuable one.

With no further questions or comments, it was subsequently

RECOMENDED – T H A T the reference from Cabinet of 25th May, 2023, and appended report to Cabinet be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of both the Cabinet reference and report to ensure the Council fully discharges its duties under both the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 to publish annual Well-being Objectives, keep performance under review and consult and report on our performance through an annual self-assessment relating to the previous financial year.

128 SUMMARY OF ESTYN INSPECTION OUTCOMES FOR SPRING TERM 2023 AND UPDATE ON SCHOOLS IN STATUTORY FOLLOW-UP (DLS) –

The report was presented by the Central South Consortium's Principal Improvement Partner, the purpose of which was to update Members on Estyn inspection outcomes of schools during the spring term 2023 and progress of schools in statutory follow-up.

Estyn inspected quality and standards in education across Wales. During the spring term 2023, one primary school, Llanfair Primary School, was inspected. The school was placed in the follow-up category of Estyn Review. No case of interesting or innovative practice was identified.

Two schools from the Vale of Glamorgan, Ysgol Pen y Garth and Pencoedtre High School, were in Estyn statutory follow-up category. Both schools were in Special Measures following their inspections during the Autumn term 2022. The Post-Inspection Action Plan and statement of action for both schools had been approved by Estyn. The progress of both schools would be monitored by Estyn on a termly basis.

Following presentation of the report, in response to a query from the Vice-Chair, the Principal Improvement Partner advised that the wellbeing of staff at schools under Estyn inspection was supported through clarity around the actions taking place, having a realistic view of what schools could achieve within specific timeframes and by looking to highlight the positive changes observed.

The Head of Standards and Provision further advised that the leaders of both schools placed in special measures had since been replaced and therefore the new leaders had been appointed knowing the challenges the schools faced. The officer added that relationships between the Council's officers, the Consortium and the leaders of the schools were strong, and that support from both parties was available to the schools.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language subsequently advised that meetings with the new leaders of both schools had been positive, particularly in relation to how staff were discussed. The Cabinet Member further advised that although the Estyn reports had been critical, the eventual outcomes for both schools would also be positive.

With no further questions or comments, it was subsequently

RECCOMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the inspection outcomes of the one school inspected during the spring term be noted
- (2) T H A T the follow up requirements for the one school in the Estyn review, and how progress would be monitored, be noted
- (3) T H A T the progress of the two schools in Special Measures in relation to the development of the Post-Inspection Action Plan and Statement of Action, be noted.

Reason for recommendations

(1-3) In order that Members of the Committee were aware of Estyn findings about local schools and actions required and undertaken in relation to schools in an Estyn follow-up category.