

No.

LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 12th October, 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, R. Godfrey, E.J. Goodjohn, W.A. Hennessy, N.P. Hodges, J. Lynch-Wilson, N. Marshallsea and J.M. Norman.

Co-Opted Members: L. Barrowclough (Parent Governor – Primary Sector), R. Morteo (Church in Wales), M. Price (Roman Catholic Church), G. Scott (Welsh Medium Education), G. van der Burgt (Parent Governor – Secondary Sector), R. Goodjohn (Vale Youth Forum), J. Clemett and T. Williams (Vale Youth Council).

Also present: Councillors J. Aviet, R.M. Birch (Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language), L. Burnett (Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources), G.D.D. Carroll, C.P. Franks, E. Goodjohn and S.J. Haines.

430 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.”

431 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE –

This was received from Councillor E. Penn.

432 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 14th September, 2023 be approved as a correct record.

433 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor W.A. Hennessy declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 4 (School Funding and Finances). The nature of the interest was that the Councillor was a Member of the VSGA.

No.

Councillor J. Lynch-Wilson declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 4 (School Funding and Finances). The nature of the interest was that the Councillor was a Member of the VSGA.

Councillor N. Marshallsea declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 4 (School Funding and Finances). The nature of the interest was that the Councillor was employed by Jane Hutt, M.S.

L. Barrowclough declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 4 (School Funding and Finances). The nature of the interest was that she was a Member of the VSGA.

Dr. M. Price declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 4 (School Funding and Finances). The nature of the interest was that Dr. Price was the Chair of VSGA.

G. Van der Burgt declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 4 (School Funding and Finances). The nature of the interest was that she was a Member of the VSGA.

434 SCHOOL FUNDING AND FINANCES – ALUN CAIRNS, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN –

The Member of Parliament (MP) for the Vale of Glamorgan began his address to Committee with an opening statement which could be summarised as follows:

- School funding and finances was potentially the most important issue facing young people in the Vale of Glamorgan currently, and the funding deficit that the Vale of Glamorgan received from Welsh Government had been significant for several years.
- The MP referred to Education Economics Consultant Luke Sibieta's October 2020 Welsh Government-commissioned report 'Review of School Spending in Wales: Building in Evidence, Fairness, Transparency and Clear Expectations', which highlighted that the Vale of Glamorgan was on average £750 per pupil below the Welsh average of funding, which in the MP's view contributed to many of the pressures currently faced by Vale of Glamorgan schools.
- The MP highlighted three key themes in Luke Sibieta's report - namely underfunding that the Vale of Glamorgan received while at the bottom of the funding 'league table', the cumulative effect of this underfunding over time, and a reported lack of transparency in the funding formula that distributed funds throughout Wales.
- In the MP's view, the funding levels the Welsh Government received from the UK Government were fair - £120 for every £100 spent in England. The MP advised that Welsh Government should be challenged on the distribution of these funds, and argued that Vale of Glamorgan pupils, teachers and Governors were not supported by the current funding arrangements.

No.

- Of particular concern to the MP were pupils with additional learning needs, for whom the MP stated that resources were being cut back on, in order to meet statutory obligations elsewhere.

Following the opening statement, and subsequent questions and comments from Members, the Member of Parliament gave the following additional advice:

- The Welsh Government had devolved powers to increase taxes to further fund education, if it found UK Government funding to be insufficient.
- In the MP's view, providing free school meals for all pupils in primary schools was potentially exaggerating the financial challenges faced by schools, by adding pressure to their already unfunded budgets.
- Education standards and resources, the MP argued, should be protected in order to achieve statutory obligations.
- The MP advised that increased UK Government funding for Wales would necessitate increases in taxation.
- Funding for education was provided to Welsh Government by the UK Government using the Barnett Formula, for distribution across Wales.
- The MP advised that public spending per person in Wales was at the highest level it had ever been, and that this supported their view that issues lay in the distribution of this funding, which should be sufficient for appropriate distribution.
- The funding formula was complex, and could be improved by updating Census data that informed it, some of which was dated back to 1991.
- Previous attempts to adjust the funding formula had relied upon the agreement of local authorities which fared well from the status quo, and would be worse off under adjusted arrangements.
- The MP advised that they would like to work with those who aimed to apply political pressure to the Welsh Government, to enact an adjustment of the formula, and ensure the Vale of Glamorgan received a fair share of funding.
- Data the MP had used to illustrate differences between education funding in England and Wales was based on trade union data.
- Changing the funding formula was not straightforward, however, means of addressing its flaws that were highlighted for their relative simplicity included the introduction of a funding floor and the use of modern Census data.

In closing, the Member of Parliament thanked the Committee for the opportunity to discuss the issues and reiterated that, according to multiple reports, pupils in the Vale of Glamorgan were more than £700 worse off than the Welsh average. The MP appealed to the Committee for all parties to work together in the best interests of the Vale of Glamorgan's young people, and to encourage debate in order to get a deal that worked better for the area. The MP called for the introduction of a funding floor, the use of up to date data, and a revision of the formula, as reported in Sibieta's review. The MP argued that the formula needed to be more transparent and simpler, and that Council Tax increases would be a consequence of underfunding schools via the formula.

No.

RECOMENDED – T H A T Alun Cairns M.P. be thanked for his time and verbal presentation on actions being taken by both the Welsh and UK Governments to address the financial issues faced by Vale of Glamorgan schools.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the verbal presentation from Alun Cairns M.P. in response to the issues raised at the June meeting of the Committee regarding school finances and funding as presented by the Chair of the Vale School Governors Association (VSGA).

435 PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE UPDATE DLS) –

The report was presented by the Inclusion Manager, the purpose of which was to raise Members' awareness of the current attendance rates in Vale of Glamorgan schools and the plans to improve them.

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.

Improving attendance had been a consistent focus for the LA. The link between good attendance and learning was clear. Good attendance supported pupils in having the best possible chance in life and maximising their potential, both in terms of academic achievement, social/emotional development and future employability.

The VoG, along with all LAs in Wales, had seen a decline in the attendance figures at both primary and secondary schools since the Covid-19 pandemic. The historic VoG attendance data below illustrated this trend when compared to the figures from the end of last academic year

Type of School / End of Year	July 2015-16	July 2016-17	July 2017-18	July 2018-19	July 2022-23
Primary	95.3%	95.2%	94.7%	94.7%	91.6%
Secondary	95%	95.1%	94.6%	94.7%	84.6%

There was no Welsh Government comparative data for 2019/20, 2020/21 or 2021/22.

There had been an increase in the percentage of persistent absenteeism (attendance below 80%) since the beginning of the COVID pandemic. This increase could be attributed to several things including anxiety in returning to school following lockdown.

No.

In response to this downward trend in attendance the VOG LA had identified a range of strategies to help support schools with the challenge of getting attendance figures back to pre-pandemic levels and beyond.

At the end of 2022/23, Vale of Glamorgan was ranked joint 6th in Wales for overall school attendance with an attendance rate of 89%. The Welsh average for this year was 88.5%, and the LA in 1st position had an attendance rate of 90%.

Following the officer's presentation in response to questions from the Committee, officers advised the following:

- Schools did a significant amount to protect and support pupils holistically, and the expansion of free school meals to all primary school pupils was likely to support attendance of pupils from families struggling financially, as well as fostering good attendance habits among children and their families which would last into secondary education.
- Barriers to attendance were numerous, and included issues with relationships at school, transport difficulties, cost implications of attending school, mental health and anxiety issues (particularly as a legacy of the pandemic), additional learning needs (ALN) and waiting times for health diagnoses, and the habits and work routines of families.
- Further research into pupil and parent voices regarding barriers to attendance was needed and being sought by officers across multiple teams.
- Elective home education rates had increased and a report focussing on this was due to be presented at November's meeting.
- Although the ideal was for pupils to remain in school, a range of bespoke support was offered to pupils experiencing mental health challenges including distanced learning packages and support to re-engage with school. Out of school tuition where schools had tried many layers of support but social, emotional and mental health issues prevented attendance at school, provided a bridge back into the school setting.
- The introduction of Ysgol Derw Newydd as a wellbeing-focussed education setting for young people, was having a positive impact on attendance at both mainstream and specialist schools, by assisting with meeting young peoples needs and providing an alternative learning environment.
- Pupils accessing the Horizon Project were previously unable to access school at all, and so their attendance had improved from zero.
- Learning online could not count towards pupil attendance, although some children were learning unofficially outside of school.
- Schools were sensitive towards pupils with, for example, medical needs that prevented perfect attendance, and improvement in attendance was celebrated and acknowledged in order to avoid an ableist approach.
- Plans including piloting walking buses and active or group travel initiatives could assist with mitigating certain barriers to attendance, and were currently being developed.

Having fully considered the matter, Committee subsequently

No.

RECOMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the Primary and Secondary School Attendance Update report be noted.
- (2) T H A T a further progress update report be received by the Committee in 6 months (April 2024).

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report on the strategic responsibility of the Council for implementing effective approaches and plans in order to optimise attendance levels.
- (2) In order to evaluate progress made in relation to the overall attendance levels and the impact of the #MissSchoolMissOut campaign, launch of the school attendance toolkit, the enhanced training and support for schools and any intervention pilot projects launched with schools for the Committee to maintain to oversight of the work of the Inclusion Team and the impact on levels of attendance across the Vale of Glamorgan Schools.

436 CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED CHANGE OF CATEGORY OF STANWELL SCHOOL (DLS) –

The report was presented by the Operational Manager for Strategy and Resources, the purpose of the report was to advise the Scrutiny Committee of the consultation on a proposal to change the category of Stanwell School from a Foundation School to a Community School.

The report advised the Committee of the proposal presented by the Governing Body of Stanwell School to change its category from a Foundation School to a Community School with effect from September 2024. The decision to progress a proposal to change the category of Stanwell School from a Foundation School to a Community school was a decision to be made by the Governing Body of Stanwell School.

The reasons for the proposal were set out below:

- The change to a Community school would improve financial management, ensure compliance and support long-term sustainability as well as impacting positively on the management of admissions within its current catchment area, as well as across the Vale of Glamorgan.
- It would allow for improved access to funding streams such as community focussed schools grants and s106 funding, for example, via the Councils Capital Maintenance and School Investment Programme.
- The school would benefit from working more closely with other secondary schools via the Local Authority ensuring that all opportunities were available and leveraged appropriately. The consultation document further outlined the advantages and disadvantages of changing status.

No.

Due to the foundation status of this school, the Governing Body would lead on the proposal with support from the Local Authority. The Governing Body were responsible for the determination of the proposal where no statutory objections were received in response to the publication of a statutory notice but where objections were received, the Local Authority would determine the proposal.

The Consultation period ran from 11th September, 2023 to 23rd October, 2023.

Following the officer's presentation, officers provided the following advice in response to questions from the Committee:

- The consultation document included a Frequently Asked Questions section and contact details for Members to use if they had queries.
- Several engagement sessions had been undertaken as part of the consultation and parents and staff were regularly reminded to respond to the consultation via the Governing Body's newsletter, in addition to the wider community in the Penarth area via local publications.
- Although response levels to the consultation were not currently high, feedback from the school indicated significant engagement activities were being carried out and responses had been balanced and broadly positive.
- The internal audit into the Wellbeing Centre at the school had concluded with an update to the Governance and Audit Committee and a more comprehensive audit was due during the Autumn Term

Councillor Birch (Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language) with permission to speak, thanked officers for their work supporting the school and advised that learning and facilities at the school should remain of a high standard.

Councillors Hodges, Birch and Payne welcomed the proposal as a positive move for the school and the community.

Having fully considered the matter, Committee subsequently

RECOMENDED –

(1) T H A T the Governing Body's decision to undertake a consultation from 11th September, 2023 to 23rd October, 2023 on the proposal to change the category of the school from a Foundation School to a Community Maintained School be noted.

(2) T H A T the proposal be endorsed by the Committee.

Reasons for recommendations

(1) Having regard to the contents of the report on the Governing Body's decision to seek feedback through a formal consultation with prescribed stakeholders, prior to any publication of its proposal, as required by the Schools Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the School Organisation Code 2018.

No.

(2) To ensure that the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee is consulted on the proposal as a prescribed stakeholder.

437 GOVERNOR TRAINING REPORT FOR THE 2022/23 ACADEMIC YEAR (DLS) –

The report was presented by the Operational Manager for Strategy and Resources, the purpose of which was to report on governor training for the 2022/23 Academic Year.

The report provided commentary and a statistical summary of the attendance and evaluations received for online governor training courses held during the 2022/23 academic year.

During the 2022/23 academic year a record number of Vale governors attended a record number of training sessions/courses. A summary of attendance over the last 9 years was provided within the report.

87 virtual courses/sessions were held, and 756 Vale governors attended last academic year. This beat the previous record of 81 courses/sessions held and 753 Vale governors attending during the 2021/22 academic year.

Following the presentation of the report, Dr. M. Price echoed the view that the standard of training had been high. In response to a query from Councillor Marshallsea, the Operational Manager for Strategy and Resources advised that advice and support was provided to Governing Bodies regarding allocating Governors to specific training courses, and that the Councillor's suggestion of encouraging one Governor per school to take the lead on training could be taken onboard.

With no further comments or questions, Committee subsequently

RECOMENDED – T H A T the Governor Training Report for the 2022/23 Academic Year be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the report on commentary, statistics of attendance, and evaluations received for online governor training courses held during the 2022/23 academic year.

No.

438 1ST AND 2ND QUARTER SCRUTINY DECISION TRACKING OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND UPDATED WORK PROGRAMME SCHEDULE 2023/24 (DCR) –

The Chair presented the report the purpose of which was to report progress on Scrutiny recommendations and to consider the updated Forward Work Programme together with any slippage for 2023/24.

The report advised Members of progress in relation to the Scrutiny Committee's historical recommendations and the updated Forward Work Programme Schedule for 2023/24:

- 1st Quarter Recommendation Tracking Apr to June 2023 (attached at Appendix A to the report);
- 2nd Quarter Recommendation Tracking July to September 2023 (attached at Appendix B to the report) and;
- Updated Forward Work Programme Schedule for 2023/24 (attached at Appendix C to the report).

Having fully considered the matter Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the status of the actions listed in Appendices A and B to the report be agreed.
- (2) T H A T the updated Forward Work Programme Schedule for 2023/24, as attached at Appendix C of the report, be approved and uploaded to the Council's website.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report to maintain effective tracking of the Committee's recommendations.
- (2) For public information.

N.B. – During discussion on Item 4, the Leader asked for the matter of whether an invitation to address Committee was extended to the Member of the Senedd for the Vale of Glamorgan to be investigated. This request was noted by Democratic and Scrutiny Services. Confirmation was provided by the Chair of the Committee during the meeting that such an invitation had been sent via email to the Member of the Senedd.