

No.

LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 4th November, 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, W. Gilligan, E. Goodjohn, W.A. Hennessy, N.P. Hodges, J. Lynch-Wilson and N.B. Marshallsea.

Co-Opted Members: M. Werrett (Church in Wales), Dr. M. Price (Roman Catholic Church), L. Barrowclough (Parent Governor – Primary Sector), G. Van Der Burgt (Parent Governor – Secondary Sector), E. Woodfield and T. Williams (Vale Youth Council).

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.

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”.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors E.J. Goodjohn and S.J. Haines.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meetings held on 27th June, 19th September and 7th October, 2024 be approved as a correct record.

No.

CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT SCHOOL ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY 2025-2027 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 19th September, 2024 as contained within the agenda was presented by the Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources.

Councillor H. Payne queried how did the strategy account for those children not in education or were not homeschooled including those with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). In response, the Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources referred to the exponential increase in the number of children with ALNs, with the Council priority aimed to ensure that local children were able to access local provision in their local schools as much as possible. The Strategy referred to the specialist support that was available, which was not just the Special School, but also resource bases such as Hafan and Horizon plus a number of Hearing Impairment Centres. There were lots of different opportunities for children to access support. The Council did have a duty of care to ensure that it provided those facilities to students, so part of the Council's work was around assessing the needs of the children, and it was found that there had been a significant change in demand, and for some of those with more complex needs, there were challenges with them being able to physically access provision particularly for some of the older school estates. The Council also had specific duties under the Equalities Act for example, that related to ensuring safe access to schools and around promoting positive outcomes for disabled children and encouraging participation. The Head of Service stated that the provision around ALN was probably full, and as demand would likely increase, it was important to ensure that facilities were as accessible as possible. In terms of those home educated, the Strategy would have a limited impact.

Councillor Payne also commented on the positive benefits of building the second Ysgol Y Deri school through providing extra capacity for additional learning needs.

The Chair, Councillor R. Thomas, referred to the specialist outreach services that supported children with learning difficulties across mainstream schools, and he queried whether there were differences in terms of how individual schools engaged with and interpreted the Strategy. The Head of Services stated that comprehensive training was provided for all schools around understanding what their roles were in terms of meeting needs and their duties of care to students. In addition, training ensured school staff had the skills and access to deliver their duties. There was an expectation that every school had to meet the required standard, which meant that there was a lot of continual development work with staff. Councillor R. Birch (Cabinet Member) with permission to speak, stated that all schools had an Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator whose role was to look after and identify the needs of children with ALNs. The Director of Learning and Skills added that all schools would have access to all specialist teachers and a comprehensive learning programme was available which was produced each year based on feedback received from schools. If a school considered that it required more support in a specialist area, then the Council could offer further nuance support and individual training sessions would be provided. It was also important to recognise that there was a specific skill set within the Council's specialist teachers which were complimented by staff at Ysgol Y Deri, but if some provision was found deficient, then further support was available on a regional basis or from a neighbouring Local Authority.

No.

Subsequently, the Committee

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the comments of the Committee be referred back to Cabinet for their consideration, as part of the proposed consultation exercise, including:

- The importance of assessing and considering the needs of the children that are not in education and not homeschooled and how the Council accounts for them as part of the Strategy, including any additional learning needs they may have;
- The positive benefits of building the second Ysgol Y Deri school through providing extra capacity for additional learning needs;
- The importance of continued provision of comprehensive and agile specialist outreach services that support children with learning difficulties across mainstream schools in the Vale of Glamorgan, to the same high standard.

Reason for recommendation

For Cabinet to consider the comments of the Committee as part of the proposed consultation exercise.

DRAFT VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN 2025-30
(REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 10th October, 2024 as contained within the agenda was presented, together with a presentation.

Councillor A. Asbrey commented on the importance of outlining further how the consultation would be funded and how comments and resident feedback would be heard, managed, organised and addressed.

Councillor H. Payne referred to the good start in life element and the Council's Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Strategy, and those children that were not attending mainstream school or being home school, and she asked how the Council would also ensure that they had a good start in life. In reply, the Director of Learning and Skills asked if further discussion with Councillor Payne on the matter could take place outside of the meeting. Councillor Payne agreed.

Councillor N. Marshallsea queried the role out of the Flying Start provision. In response, the Director advised that she was unclear and so information would be sent outside of the Committee meeting.

Councillor N. Marshallsea commented that she really liked Objective 5 - Being the Best Council We Can Be, and she stated that as part of the Corporate Plan and consultation, it was important that the Vale of Glamorgan Council communicated to residents the focus on the proportion of the budget used and spending undertaken for education and schools, through its Communications team and other means.

No.

Councillor J. Lynch-Wilson stated that it was important to highlight the efforts made by the Council through its schools and educational establishments in addressing poverty and the impact of this on children and their family such as missed opportunities, through providing support in areas such as developing essential and basic skills and other opportunities. The Director agreed with the Councillor's comments and added that the Council was working well with schools, and schools were responding well to that challenge and to ensure that all children became lifelong learners with the necessary skills to take on jobs within our communities.

A Vale Youth Council Representative commented that from a young person's perspective the Corporate Plan was written in complicated way. In response, the Director stated that the Council had been looking at ways to make the Plan and the information available more accessible.

Councillor E. Goodjohn queried Objective 3 and action 10 which related to empowering young people to have a stronger voice in decision making, and he asked how that would be strengthened, and how would the Council reach out to people who did not normally engage and respond around the Corporate Plan and consultation. In reply, the Director stated that it was important for the Council to create documents or information that were worded in a way that wasn't dependent on corporate speak, and to ensure that the high-level objectives translated to ordinary everyday life. It was therefore important to ensure that information provided was influenced by young people, that those engaging understood why they were contributing to a consultation and to ensure that the language used was clear. In addition, the Director had a wish to strengthen practices and work undertaken within schools and to reach out to those groups that traditionally found it difficult to respond or engage with the Council.

Councillor E. Goodjohn commented that it was important for the Council to have a two-way conversation with residents and for the way that the Council engaged more accessible. He added that there should be collaboration with the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Head of Digital and Youth Service to help improve engagement with younger people, etc. through digital communication and other similar cost-effective means.

The Chair stated that 2030 was a long way off and so there could be a significant amount of change and who was accountable to ensure that objectives and targets would be met and on track. In response the Director stated the regular monitoring reports would be provided to the Committee, with the reporting mechanism streamlined to ensure there was a clearer focus which would assist the scrutiny of the work of officers and the Council.

The Chair asked for consideration to be given to including in the Plan's efforts to tackle poverty, the means to tackle poor educational outcomes and to ensure that children received and reached the appropriate educational outcomes and standards at the various stages of their educational journey. In response, the Director stated that it was important for schools to have clarity of what was expected from them and where children were expected to be in terms of their education performance. There would be key focus on basic skills including literacy and numeracy.

No.

Councillor A. Asbrey queried whether there were plans to make all teaching assistants QTS qualified. In reply, the Director advised that it was allowed for an HLT to take over some of the duties, but those were not instead of a qualified teacher, who had the main responsibility to ensure that the needs of children were met.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the following comments from Committee be shared with the Director of Corporate Resources to inform revisions to the Corporate Plan, prior to Cabinet considering a final draft in due course:

- The importance of outlining further how the consultation will be funded and how comments and resident feedback will be heard, managed, organised and addressed;
- The importance of ensuring that those not in mainstream school or homeschooling are considered as part of the Corporate Plan and Additional Learning Needs Strategy;
- As part of the Corporate Plan and consultation, it was important that the Vale of Glamorgan Council communicated to residents the focus on, the proportion of the budget used and spending undertaken for education and schools, through its Communications team and other means;
- The importance of efforts made by the Council through its schools and educational establishments in addressing poverty and the impact of this on children and their family such as missed opportunities, through providing support in areas such as developing essential and basic skills and other opportunities;
- The need to ensure that the Corporate Plan was as accessible, easy and simple to understand as possible, in order to reach younger people and other groups of people within the Vale of Glamorgan;
- The need to strengthen engagement and further empower younger people within the Vale of Glamorgan and to reach out to people who do not normally engage and respond around the Corporate Plan and consultation. This should include collaboration with the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Head of Digital and Youth Service to help improve engagement with younger people, etc. through digital communication and other similar cost-effective means;
- To ensure that there is ongoing monitoring and scrutiny of the Corporate Plan, in order that its targets and objectives are delivered, met and that it remains on track to achieve these objectives;
- Consideration to be given to including in the Plan's efforts to tackle poverty, the means to tackle poor educational outcomes and to ensure that children receive and reach the appropriate educational outcomes and standards at the various stages of their educational journey.

Reason for recommendation

For the comments of the Committee to be shared with the Director of Corporate Resources to inform revisions to the Corporate Plan, prior to Cabinet consideration.