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## LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 2025.

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, W. Gilligan, E.J. Goodjohn, E. Goodjohn, S.J. Haines, 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), G. Scott (Welsh Medium Education) and E. Woodfield and I Da Silva (Vale Youth Council).

Also Present: Councillors R.M. Birch (Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language), L. Burnett (Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources), C.P. Franks, G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing) and E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health).

### 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”.

### APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE –

This was received from Councillor S. Campbell.

### MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> January, 2025 be approved as a correct record.

### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

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PRESENTATION: OVERVIEW OF THE SIGNIFICANT SCHOOL IMPROVEMENTS SECURED THROUGH LEADERSHIP: HEADTEACHER OF YSGOL GYMRAEG PEN Y GARTH AND EXECUTIVE HEADTEACHER FOR PENCOEDTRE AND WHITMORE HIGH SCHOOLS –

The Committee welcomed B. Pugh, Headteacher for Ysgol Gymraeg Pen Y Garth and I. Robinson, Executive Headteacher for Pencoedtre and Whitmore High Schools. Both had been invited to provide a PowerPoint presentation on how school improvements had been secured through effective leadership.

B. Pugh in providing her PowerPoint presentation referred to the following:

- The importance of embedding the school's vision and values,
- Identifying areas for development,
- Sharing the non-negotiable high expectations,
- Strong staff/pupil relationships were important, through termly check-ins with staff, having a pupil and staff voice, trusting the staff and regular praise and thanks,
- Robust Performance Management processes,
- Strong focus on teaching,
- Daily self-evaluation,
- Monitoring impact,
- Strengthen links with the community,
- the Curriculum,
- Be open and honest with all stakeholders,
- Staff, pupil and parent questionnaire,
- Lead with example, and
- Frequent opportunities for training.

Councillor N. Marshallsea offered thanks to B. Pugh and the staff at Ysgol Gymraeg Pen Y Garth, for their hard working in achieving significant improvements, and stated that it was pleasing to see all staff being offered professional development.

Councillor Marshallsea queried what were the changes made to ensure that teaching was more consistent. In reply, B. Pugh advised that there had been a lot of focus on pedagogy and teaching within staff and departmental meetings, and specifically looking at what good teaching was and what it was not. There were also opportunities for lesson observations and to ask other teachers what approaches worked. Estyn had observed that the practice of professional development and the standard of teaching across the school was consistent and good.

M.C. Werrett (Co-Opted Member) queried with B. Pugh, how was her wellbeing supported during the period of the school requiring improvement. In response, B. Pugh stated that she had received support through regular meetings with officers from the Vale of Glamorgan Council and the Central South Consortium. Assistance and guidance were always a phone call away. In addition, the school governing body had been supportive has had the staff group at the school.

Councillor Payne asked for more information around book scrutiny. B. Pugh stated that an important element of that was lesson observations and the importance also

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of giving teachers appropriate notice. So, whenever lessons were to be monitored, usually at the beginning of every term, there would be two weeks' notice in advance. Initially it was the Senior Leadership Team or the Improvement Partner looking at books, but recently the school had 3 middle leaders leading on digital numeracy and literacy, who were involved in leading the scrutiny, listening to the learners, learning walks, etc.

G. Scott (Welsh Medium Co-Opted Member) stated that as a Governor for the school, he wanted to offer thanks and appreciation to B. Pugh and the staff.

Councillor A. Asbrey queried challenges and staff morale at the school at the time that B. Pugh was appointed. B. Pugh stated that as she was new to the school, she had to spend 2 to 3 months getting to know each staff member. Morale at the school was surprisingly high as the staff group saw it as an opportunity for a fresh start. Staff were keen to embrace changes at the school and they appreciated leadership and wanted more guidance. It was important therefore that the staff felt listened to.

The Chair, Councillor R. Thomas queried the community links established by the school. In response B. Pugh stated, that was around making the school more visible to the community. For example, the choir had visited the nearby residential home and attended an event on Barry Island. In addition, during December the school had arranged an open morning, which had been successful in encouraging parents to consider applying for a school place.

Councillor R. Birch (Cabinet Member) offered congratulations to the school too.

With regard to Pencoedtre High School, I. Robinson highlighted the following:

- Focussing on teaching and learning,
- Over presence of Senior Leaders, on tour, on duty. Relentlessly positive,
- One change at a time,
- Over communication of clear direction and positivity – culture shift,
- Appointing staff internally, and
- Banning mobile phones.

Councillor A. Asbrey queried the use of supply teachers at the school. I. Robinson stated it was difficult for supply teachers to fully understand the ethos of a school. At present in Pencoedtre, there were 3 cover teachers in place, all of whom were training for or willing to follow the school's professional development programme. It was important for the school to employ the right people.

Councillor N. Marshallsea queried plans to increase pupil attendance rates. In response, I. Robinson stated that it was vital for the school environment to be safe, so that staff and pupils were happy to be there. Pupils being excited about lessons was important as was extra curriculum activities, particularly clubs and groups during break and lunch times. Improvements had to be transformational to ensure that pupils were happier.

Councillor H. Payne referred to attitudes around attendance and achievement, particularly in relation to negative comments about the school on social media, and

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she asked whether parents were currently voicing similar comments. In response, I. Robinson stated that attitudes towards the school were very different now. Some parents for Year 6 pupils in primary school had expressed concern about sending their children to Pencoedtre, but parents for Year 7 pupils were happy with how the school had progressed. It was important to relay to parents that a child's experience at Pencoedtre would be no different than for those attending Whitmore.

The Committee agreed for a further visit to Pencoedtre to be arranged over the next few months.

Councillor N. Hodges referred to comments around the reading age of Year 7 pupils joining Pencoedtre being 3 years behind, and he asked whether that was a true assessment. Councillor Hodges also queried whether it was true that the design of the new building was not conducive for discipline or high attendance. In reply, I. Robinson stated that as the PISA results had indicated, literacy across Wales needed more focus. On admission to Pencoedtre, pupils would be assessed as it was important to have an accurate picture of where they were in terms of reading and writing and to be able to identify any gaps. With regards to the building, I. Robinson stated that there were no issues with the design, but one of the most important changes made was removing split breaks and split lunches. That change had made it easier for staff to know where pupils were supposed to be.

The Chair, Councillor R. Thomas queried the current attendance rate. I. Robinson advised that it was around 75%, and it was recognised that there were significant challenges in just raising the rate even by 1%. For the current Year 7, the attendance rate was 90%, which compared favourably to other schools with a similar demographic. There was more work to do, but the key was to ensure that pupils were happy going to school. There were also individuals' personal circumstances which affected attendance, so there were unique challenges or barriers to be considered with a particular emphasis on the more vulnerable pupils which would be a focus of the school's Head of Attendance.

The Chair also queried plans to improve the literacy rate. I. Robinson stated that it was important for all schools, primary and secondary schools to ensure that pupils were able to read and write and be able to access the learning that they needed. Reading and writing were key life skills.

Councillor R. Birch (Cabinet Member), with permission to speak, stated that raising attendance was the main challenge facing the school. It was interesting to see that the first area of focus was teaching and learning rather than poor behaviours, which created a better learning environment for the children and teachers.

There being no further comments or queries, the Committee

**RECOMMENDED – T H A T** the presentations be noted and the Headteachers invited be thanked and congratulated for their good work.

#### Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the presentations and discussions at the meeting.

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## INITIAL BUDGET 2025/26 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2025/26 TO 2029/30 PROPOSALS FOR CONSULTATION (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 16<sup>th</sup> January, 2025 was presented by the Operational Manager – Accountancy.

The Chair, Councillor R. Thomas, stated that the funding formula for schools was a concern, and he asked how discussions were held with Welsh Government and whether there were any local authorities working together, to change the formula. In response, the Operational Manager advised that there was a distinct sub-group that worked with Welsh Government about reviewing any potential change. There were also a number of outside groups, such as the Treasures Group of which the Council's Section 151 Officer was a member, the Association of Directors of Social Services and the Association of Directors of Education. There was also several finance and service level groups. All would make representation on funding to Welsh Government. In terms of local authorities lobbying Welsh Government, the formula impacted differently and was dependent on demographic pressures. So, whilst there are certain authorities that were perhaps more motivated to lobby Welsh Government, some were more minded to keep the status quo.

The Chair also asked whether there had been any assessment of the potential number of redundancies within schools and what plans were there to minimise them. The Operational Manager clarified that there had yet to be an assessment, with the current focus being the impact of the formula on the budget proposals. The final settlement from Welsh Government would be required before an assessment could be undertaken. There had been some redundancies at a school level and a loss of some temporary staff. The Head of Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources added there were two strands of work to assist schools. One was the around a reduction in the use of agency staff, and the other related to temporary contracts.

In terms of budget proposals for Additional Learning Needs, the Director of Learning Skills clarified that proposals related to the need to manage acute demand and then to look at ways to increase capacity. The first area of demand was around increasing resource bases within primary schools as a way of alleviating issues and challenges for children as they became older. There was also a focus on supporting the emotional needs for children in secondary schools at an earlier age before they might require more specialist and expensive and potentially out of county support.

Councillor N. Marshallsea commented that the Council should feel proud that the Vale of Glamorgan continued to fund local services and schools. In addition, Councillor Payne commented that there were very good facilities across the Vale of Glamorgan, and the quality of provision provided could sometimes be forgotten.

Councillor N. Hodges commented that the budget proposals would be going out for public consultation, and he wondered how much Cabinet would take on board comments made by the public, given the level interest into recent proposals around car parking charges. Councillor Hodges queried the use of the Risk and Smoothing

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reserve. The Operational Manager advised that the reserve had been introduced during quarter 2 in conjunction with a new process whereby all requests to use reserves would now go through the Council's Strategic Leadership Team. The use of the Risk and Smoothing reserve had been earmarked for areas such as the energy crisis and pay pressures.

Subsequently, the Committee

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the contents of the report and the updated financial position for the Council as set out in the report be noted.

(2) T H A T the comments of the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee be referred to the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee for its consideration.

Reasons for recommendations

(1&2) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMME PROPOSALS 2025/26 TO 2029/30 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 16<sup>th</sup> January, 2025 was presented.

Councillor N. Hodges compared the cost to building works for St. Richard Gwyn, estimated to be £65m, to £47m it cost to rebuild Pencoedtre. In reply, the Finance Support Manager stated that difference was due to an increase in construction costs as a result of inflation and a rise in prices.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the draft Capital Programme for 2025/26 to 2029/30 be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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

CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM: ANNUAL LOCAL AUTHORITY SCRUTINY REPORT 2023-24 (DLS) –

The purpose of the report, presented by the Principal Improvement Partner, was to provide an overview of the work of Central South Consortium and to update Members on the contribution of the consortium, working in partnership with the Local Authority (LA), to raising standards in schools across the Vale of Glamorgan.

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The work of the Central South Consortium played a vital role in the delivery of the Council's statutory responsibilities in relation to schools. Since 2012, Central South Consortium had delivered aspects of school improvement services on behalf of the five Authorities: Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Vale of Glamorgan.

The report detailed the work of the Consortium for the academic year September 2023 to 2024 and the financial year April 2023 to April 2024.

The report also included several short case studies that exemplified how Central South Consortium (CSC) had supported schools in the Vale of Glamorgan and the impact of this work.

Councillor A. Asbrey asked whether the CSC had access to data relating to reading ages for pupils in primary schools. In reply, the Principal Improvement Partner advised that data was only available to the schools, which could not be shared with the Council or CSC.

Councillor N. Marshallsea queried how could more teaching assistants be encouraged to take up development opportunities. In reply, the Assistant Director for Curriculum and Professional Learning clarified that the teaching assistant pathway programs contained 3 three programs depending on the where the teaching assistant was in their career. There was the induction program that was available on-line, then the practice in teaching program, which was a full day course face to face, and finally, the Aspiring HLTA program. It had been recognised that engagement levels had been low across Wales and the reason identified being lack of time and money to release staff. As a result, the CSC was now providing bespoke programs within schools and school clusters, which had increased engagement.

Councillor Marshallsea commented that 94% of schools were engaged with the cluster approach, and she asked why that was not all schools. The Assistant Director for Curriculum and Professional Learning stated that some schools may engage in different ways, for example through the Headteachers' meetings.

Councillor Marshallsea queried whether engagement sessions for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) were entirely on-line and whether they had opportunities to meet with peers. In response, the Assistant Director for Curriculum and Professional Learning confirmed that there were opportunities to meet with their peers. Mentoring support was available through the CSC and there was a national programme of professional learning that was provided on-line. On a regional basis, the CSC would also run the Aspire programme that was hosted by 20 schools across the region which was held face to face. That was a cohort of 20 to 30 people and held over 5 days.

Councillor H. Payne referred to paragraph 9.1 and asked for clarification regarding outdoor education. In response, the Assistant Director for Curriculum and Professional Learning confirmed that it related to the strategy functions with regard to educational visits provided by the CSC to local authorities. There was an on-line record system for all visits that had to be completed which included a risk assessment which had to receive prior approval from the CSC. To undertake visits all schools required an EPC

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Coordinator to be in post. It was agreed for a further report on educational visits to be provided to the Scrutiny Committee.

Subsequently, it was agreed that

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the report attached at Appendix A outlining the impact of the Central South Consortium's work be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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