

No.

LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 3rd March, 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) 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), 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”.

MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd February, 2025 be approved as a correct record.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor E. Goodjohn declared an interest in Agenda Item No. 4 – Annual Report for SACRE/SAC 2023-2024 (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education) / SAC (Standing Advisory Council). The interest was a personal interest as Councillor Goodjohn was a member of the Council appointed by the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

Councillor R. Thomas (Chair) declared an interest in Agenda Item No. 4 – Annual Report for SACRE/SAC 2023-2024 (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education) / SAC (Standing Advisory Council). The interest was a personal interest

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as Councillor Thomas was a member of the Council appointed by the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

Councillor J. Lynch-Wilson declared an interest in Agenda Item No. 9 – Update on St. Athan Primary School. The nature of the interest was that Councillor Lynch-Wilson was a governor for the school and remained in the meeting for the duration of the item.

Councillor S. Haines declared an interest in Agenda Item No. 9 – Update on St. Athan Primary School. The nature of the interest was that Councillor Haines was a governor for the school and remained in the meeting for the duration of the item.

ANNUAL REPORT FOR SACRE/SAC 2023-204 (STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION) / SAC (STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL) (REF) –

The report from Cabinet of 20th February, 2025 was presented by the Senior Governor Support Officer.

The Chair referred to a recent Court case which resulted in a successful challenge against a decision to exclude humanists from sitting on the SACRE/SAC.

Having considered the report, the Committee

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the contents of the Annual Report for SACRE/SAC 2023-2024 (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education) / SAC (Standing Advisory Council, be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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

ANNUAL EQUALITIES MONITORING REPORT 2023-2024 (REF) –

The report from Cabinet of 20th February, 2025 was presented by the Operational Manager - Corporate Communications.

Councillor H. Payne commented that although the report contained some references, there was no specific section covering Mental Health, particularly in relation to education, staff or service users. In reply, the Operational Manager stated that the Council's new Strategic Equality plan would shortly be approved, and as part of that monitoring there could be opportunity to pick up some of the Mental Health elements.

Councillor S. Campbell queried whether Information contained in the report would be used to assist the decision-making process. It was agreed that further information on the dashboard and use of data would be sent outside of the meeting.

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Councillor Payne asked whether equalities information in relation to recruitment and the use of agency staff was also counted as part of the monitoring process. It was agreed for that query to be passed to the Head of Human Resources.

The Chair, Councillor R. Thomas queried expectations around targets and outcomes of the Quick Start programme, and he asked for further information around the format of meetings for the Safe Space project. The Operational Manager stated that further information on Quick Start would be shared with the Committee. In terms of the Safe Space project, meetings would be held on a confidential basis, but clarification would be sought from the Director of Corporate Resources.

Subsequently, the Committee

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the comments of the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee be referred back to Cabinet for consideration and inclusion in the final version of the Annual Equality Monitoring Report. The comments for consideration included:

- Although the report contained references, there was no specific section covering Mental Health, particularly in relation to education, staff or service users;
- Equalities Information in relation to recruitment and the use of agency staff could be included as part of the monitoring process;
- Information contained in the report could be used to assist the decision-making process;
- Expectations around targets and outcomes of the Quick Start programme to be added.

Reason for recommendation

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

READING IN THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN (DLS) –

The report was presented by the Central South Consortium (CSC) Principal Improvement Partner, who was joined by the CSC Principal Improvement Partner for Curriculum.

Appendix A to the report, provided an overview of reading in Vale of Glamorgan schools. It covered the national context, local authority insights from Estyn inspection reports and school development plan priorities, support from the CSC, challenges, and effective practices for promoting reading.

In 2021, the Welsh Government prioritised reading and oracy to reduce the attainment gap. Declining reading scores in Wales were noted in PISA tests from 2018 and 2023 and in online personalised assessment data between 2021/22 and 2022/23. Measures announced by Welsh Government in 2024 include placing the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) on a statutory footing along with the creation of additional guidance and resources.

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In terms of the Vale of Glamorgan, Estyn inspected 24 schools (3 secondary, 21 primary) from February 2022 to December 2024. Primary schools showed progress in reading skills, but some pupils struggled with fluency and comprehension. Secondary schools demonstrated strong reading skills, though some pupils lacked frequent reading opportunities.

There had been a consistent focus on literacy and reading in school development plan priorities over the past three years. Priorities included improving reading standards, phonics, and fostering positive reading attitudes.

CSC offered a comprehensive professional learning (PL) programme to support reading in Vale of Glamorgan schools. Engagement data showed active participation from schools in reading-related PL. CSC also provided bespoke support to support schools with specific improvement priorities.

Challenges around reading included a declining reading standard in some schools, which was requiring targeted interventions. Equity of provision, especially for Welsh medium schools, remains a challenge. Schools report positive developments in promoting a reading culture and examples include Cogan's Primary's Picture Book Award and Evenlode Primary's 'hook and book' curriculum approach.

Councillor S. Haines commented that Welsh Government needed to release data on pupil attainment for schools, so that the Vale of Glamorgan Council could identify areas for improvement, and he formally requested for the Committee to make representations to Welsh Government. The Principal Improvement Partner for Curriculum stated that access to data had been something that had been raised by other local authorities across Wales as it was a challenge in not having that information at local authority or a regional level.

Councillor N. Hodges supported the call for the Committee to make representations to Welsh Government. He also commended Barry Town Council on their annual grant for books to schools.

Councillor H. Payne referred to techniques for reading, as from working with adolescents she had noticed that although some struggles with reading, most would be very literate when it came to technology and using computers. Councillor Payne therefore asked what techniques were being used to improve their reading. In response, the Principal Improvement Partner for Curriculum advised that the online personalised assessments that were conducted across Wales were digital assessments. Those were screen based and adapted for each individual learner. It was identified that younger learners struggled with online assessments because they were learning to read through paper books which they found easier to navigate. Using a touch screen also required a different skill. Similarly, some adolescents may not prefer a digital assessment. The Principal Improvement Partner for Curriculum added that Welsh Government had strengthened the guidance and wording, specifically around the inclusion of phonics and the role of phonics within the curriculum, with the framework containing some details around reading experiences. Within the CSC, the Principal Improvement Partner for Curriculum advised that there was an evidenced based approach which covered the word level of understanding

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and then looked at language comprehension as well and tying the teaching pedagogy and methodology closely to that. There were also specific approaches for pupils with Additional Learning Needs.

Councillor N. Marshallsea stated that she had expected a decline in literacy due to Covid-19, but it was important for pupils to enjoy reading.

Councillor A. Asbrey commented that she did not understand why the Council could not see the data for pupil's reading ages. The Principal Improvement Partner for Curriculum stated that this came from a review by Welsh Government of the school improvement and accountability arrangements which meant that schools held their own data and used it to inform self-evaluation and improvement planning.

M. Werrett (Co-Opted Member) commented that partnership working between schools and parents or carers could lead to good results when it came to reading and literacy. M. Werrett asked if there was any knowledge of any particular programs and skills for parents that schools were running. In reply, the Principal Improvement Partner advised that some schools had held reading cafes with parents to raise awareness of approaches to reading, and some schools had held workshops on phonics. There was a focus on enjoyable activities such as book swap shops.

Councillor Marshallsea asked whether any consideration had been given to Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED). The Principal Improvement Partner commented that on a similar theme there was the million words initiative and there were other schemes run by schools throughout the Vale of Glamorgan.

Councillor E.J. Goodjohn stated that she supported all initiatives, and it was important that those were child led with good access to reading materials. Reading needed to be linked to everyday experiences a focus on real life.

The Chair queried the use of the queuing method when it came to phonics. In reply, the Principal Improvement Partner for Curriculum stated that from the perspective of the CSC's professional learning, it had never endorsed the cueing approach to teaching and reading. The CSCs had an evidenced based approach to the teaching of reading for early years. Some schools may have purchased a resource which included the cueing approach, but it was not something that was part of the CSCs approach.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the contents of the report be noted.
- (2) T H A T on behalf of the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee and given the Committee's concern regarding data sharing of pupil attainment levels, the Chair writes to the Welsh Government Minister for Education calling for improved data sharing arrangements.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) So that the Chair write to the Welsh Government Minister for Education regarding concerns around data sharing of pupil attainment levels.

VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL'S WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN (WESP) 2022-34 – UPDATE ON ANNUAL REVIEW REPORT 2023-24 (DLS) –

The purpose of the report, presented by the Welsh Education Officer, was to update the Scrutiny Committee on the progress of the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) Annual Review Report 2023-24 and the feedback received from Welsh Government.

Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050: A Million Welsh Speakers Strategy placed a duty on all Local Authorities in Wales to increase the proportion of all school year groups that received their education through the medium of Welsh and placed a particular emphasis on increasing the number of learners in Year 1 taught through the medium of Welsh. A key commitment within the Plan was the proposal to increase the number of Year 1 children taught through the medium of Welsh to 24% by 2031-32. That equated to approximately 390 Year 1 places being made available by 2031-32. The target was challenging and in the middle of the target range that the Council had been set by Welsh Government.

To address its duty, the Council had produced a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2022-32 vision and strategy which was approved by Cabinet on 8th September, 2022.

An Annual Review Report 2023-24 (attached at Appendix A to the report) was required to be submitted to Welsh Government on the year two performance of the Council's WESP. That was submitted on 31st July, 2024 with Annual Review Report feedback (attached at Appendix B to the report) received from Welsh Government on 4th December, 2024. It was reported that the feedback from Welsh Government was excellent and provided a basis for ongoing discussion and support. No amendments or revisions to the report were required as a result of the feedback received.

The report outlined the key points within the Council's Annual Review Report which could be considered in full alongside the feedback received from Welsh Government.

Councillor A. Asbrey queried if there was any grant money available assist with pupil transport from Dinas Powys to Ysgol Pen-Y-Garth. The Operational Manager - Strategy, Community Learning and Resources clarified that no grant was available but discussions with the Councillor on options would be raised outside of the meeting.

Councillor N. Marshallsea asked how the Specialist Resource Base (SRB) and Ysgol Gwaun Y Nant was performing. In reply, the Welsh Education Officer stated that it was going well although not operating at full capacity as the Council was working through

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the processes and there had been recent discussions within the WESP Working Group about developing a clear protocol around accessing the SRB.

Councillor Marshallsea queried whether there was any support available for Welsh speaking students leaving Wales and transitioning between Welsh and English as a medium. The Welsh Education Officer stated that it was a concern raised by parents but there was not any specific support available. The Council has launched a significant marketing promotion campaign and was producing 13 videos, one for each of the Welsh medium schools in the Vale of Glamorgan. In addition, there would also be bespoke videos focusing on Additional Learning Needs (ALN), Early Years / Childcare, Transition, Workforce and the Immersion Centre. That work was aimed at raising the profile of Welsh education and to break down some of those barriers that some people perceived about Welsh education.

Councillor Marshallsea raised a query regarding Welsh medium reading materials containing English translation that would assist parents. In response, the Welsh Education Officer stated that was a recognised challenge and across Wales there was a drive looking at the development of resources which was supported by Welsh Government through improved joint working on a regional basis.

Councillor N. Hodges commented on a good report which highlighted an increase in Welsh speaking in Barry. It was also good to see a secondary Welsh medium school earmarked for the western Vale. Councillor Hodges queried whether there was anything else the Council could be doing to encourage parents to consider Welsh medium education for their children. In reply, the Welsh Education Officer stated that the key was capturing the hearts and minds of parents and carers and introducing the option of Welsh education in early years. That was why the Council had produced 13 promotional videos, but it was also recognised that videos also needed to be produced which were tailored and targeted at the Welsh medium schools in the Vale of Glamorgan and their catchment areas. In addition, there were also plans to create a dedicated website for Welsh education.

Subsequently, it was agreed that

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the contents of the Annual Review Report 2023-2024 and the feedback received by Welsh Government in terms of the long term commitment outlined in the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2022-32, be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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

ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN MONITORING REPORT: QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE 2024/25 (DLS) –

The purpose of the report, presented by the Senior Corporate Performance Partner, was to advise of the Quarter 3 performance results for the period 1st April to

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31st December, 2024 in delivering the 2024/25 Annual Delivery Plan commitments as aligned to the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives.

Appendix A outlined the Council's performance for the period 1st April to 31st December, 2024 against the Annual Delivery Plan commitments for 2024/25 as aligned to the remit of the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee.

For reference, detailed performance commentary for all actions and measures was appended to the report at Appendix B and provided contextual information.

Councillor H. Payne queried whether data and statistics in relation to fixed term exclusions and ALN Pupils was available. It was agreed for information to be shared with the Committee via email.

Councillor S. Haines commented that pupil attainment levels would sit nicely within the Annual Delivery Plan.

The Chair raised a concern regarding an amber rating for SCL/A015 – Work in partnership across the Council to establish sustainable solutions for school transport services and where possible make use of public transport where feasible and queried specific plans and whether routes would be changed. In reply, the Senior Corporate Performance Partner advised that it formed part of the Council's transformational programme, with an aim to reduce costs. A workshop of officers from across the Council had recently been held and all options would be considered, which could include an active travel element as well.

Subsequently, it was agreed that

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the Q3 performance results and progress towards achieving the Annual Delivery Plan 2024/25 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 views and comments of the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee be referred to Cabinet for its consideration. Comments related to:

- Statistics in relation to fixed term exclusions and ALN Pupils would be shared with the Committee;
- Pupil attainment levels in relation to reading/literacy would sit nicely within the Annual Delivery Plan;
- Concern regarding an amber rating for SCL/A015 - Work in partnership across the Council to establish sustainable solutions for school transport services and where possible make use of public transport where feasible.

Reason for recommendations

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

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MATTER WHICH THE CHAIR HAD DECIDED WAS URGENT –

RESOLVED – T H A T the following matter which the Chair had decided was urgent for the reason given beneath the minute heading be considered.

UPDATE ON ST ATHAN PRIMARY SCHOOL (DLS) –
(Matter which the Chair had decided was urgent by need of updating Members on the current position of St Athan Primary School following a major incident (fire))

The Head of Strategy, Community Learning & Resources presented the report, the purpose of which was to provide an update on the school's recovery following damage to the site.

It was reported that on 12th February, a fire broke out at St. Athan Primary School during the school day above the ICT suite. All Health and Safety procedures were in place and followed.

School based staff, under the leadership of the Acting Headteacher, were admirable in their response, evacuating all staff and pupil in under 2 minutes. There were no injuries.

South Wales Fire and Rescue Service (SWFRS) responded to the site immediately and contained the fire to a single block.

Remote learning protocols were put in motion to support pupils at home while the damage was assessed and recovery plans put into action to ensure a safe return to school.

A support hub was established at St. Athan Community Library for access to school meals, ICT and family engagement with school staff / support officers. Support from the local community, Council officers, partner organisations and Welsh Government had been extremely helpful and to the benefit of pupils and staff.

The school would be reopening from 6th March to all staff and pupils.

The Chair paid credit to the staff for acting so swiftly and thanked the SWFRS for making sure the site was safe.

Councillor S. Haines thanked the teachers and pupils and also Council staff for their response, and he asked for a further update report in due course following the investigation. The Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources confirmed that a further update would be provided over time.

Councillor J. Lynch-Wilson offered thanks to staff and children for a text book evacuation which showed the importance of fire drills. Councillor Lynch-Wilson commended the response from the local community of St. Athan which included raising money for damaged property due to the fire.

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Councillor H. Payne also commended the staff and children.

The Committee

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the contents of the report be noted, and everyone commended for their swift and effective action in dealing with the crisis.

Reason for recommendation

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