



CABINET

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY 24TH JULY 2024 AT 1PM

Councillor S. Morgan – Chair

Councillors:

J. Pritchard (Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change), N. George (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Property and Highways), P. Leonard (Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Protection), C. Morgan (Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces), E. Stenner (Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance), C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education), S. Cook (Cabinet Member for Housing) and E. Forehead (Cabinet Member for Social Care).

Together with:

D. Street (Deputy Chief Executive), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services), M.S. Williams (Corporate Director of Economy and Environment) and G. Jenkins (Interim Director of Social Services).

Also in Attendance:

R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), S. Harris (Head of Finance and S151 Officer), M. Lloyd (Head of Infrastructure), H. Jones (Waste Strategy and Operations Manager), V. Doyle (Policy Officer), K. Adams (Integrated Transport Unit – Team Leader) L. Thomas (Place Shaping and Sustainable Communities for Learning Manager), K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), K. Peters (Corporate Policy Manager), E. Strathdee (Manager Admissions, Policy and Customer Services), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy and Programme Director) A. West (Place Shaping and Sustainable Communities for Learning Service Manger), R. Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services), M. Pinch (Team Leader Food safety, Communicable Disease and Health and Safety) and J. Thomas (Committee Services Officer).

RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Leader reminded those present that the meeting was being live streamed, and a recording would be made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items. [Click Here To View](#).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from C. Harrhy (Chief Executive).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor S. Cook declared two personal interests in relation to Agenda Item 10 - Mobilising Team Caerphilly – Place Shaping in that he is the Vice Chair of Plas Y Felin Primary School Governing Body, and a close family member attends the school.

As these were personal interests only, the Member could participate in the debate and vote.

3. MINUTES – WEDNESDAY 26TH JUNE 2024.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 26th June 2024 be approved as a correct record.

4. CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – TO NOTE

Cabinet was provided with the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, which detailed the scheduled reports until October 2024.

Cabinet was pleased with the Forward Work Programme but requested that more dates be scheduled for budget setting processes and stated that they would expect more items listed with regards to the Transformation Programme.

The Deputy Chief Executive assured Cabinet that during recess the Forward Work Programme will be brought further up to date. However, there will likely be a need for special Cabinet meetings.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the Forward Work Programme be noted. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

5. RENEWAL OF WINTER MAINTENANCE FLEET

Consideration was given to the report which sought Cabinet approval on the winter maintenance fleet renewal strategy options together with the funding proposals.

Cabinet sought clarification on whether there are contingency plans if the order placed in July 2024 were to be delayed for unforeseen circumstances. The Head of Infrastructure explained that should there be any delays the Authority would work with the supplier of the gritters, which are a company called ECON and hire arrangements can be made. The Officer assured Cabinet that there would not be a shortfall in services provided.

Responding to a query raised, the Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer advised Cabinet that utilising the reserves and the revenue contribution to capital is the lower cost option, and when the existing vehicles come off lease there will be financial benefits to the Council. This would be kept under review and at the appropriate time, it will need to be considered whether those savings are taken to support the wider MTFP savings requirement or whether those savings could be reinvested into further revenue contributions to capital for vehicle purchases moving forward.

Cabinet queried whether Fleet Services are in a good position to manage the winter fleet and its maintenance. The Officer advised Members that the service falls under the Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services, but as a service user, Highways have seen significant improvements with how the fleet is being repaired with the additional resources and confirmed that it is now in a much healthier position to manage the service. The Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services, advised Cabinet that the service has received lots of positive feedback across service areas that have noticed the improvement

since the appointment of two permanent Fleet Managers. There have also been further appointments within the workshop, therefore the capacity is far better. The Officer explained there are further improvements being made in the future to enhance the ability to support specialist vehicles.

Cabinet sought further clarification on whether the vehicles mentioned within the report would be purely used for winter maintenance. The Head of Infrastructure clarified that the five vehicles are multipurpose vehicles that would be used on highway schemes throughout the year.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms confirmation and verbal vote, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for reasons contained within the Officers report the request to use service reserves along with Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay (RCCO) of £748,250 for the winter maintenance fleet replacement strategy for the reasons outlined in the report be approved

6. COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT FUND – TREATMENT OF UNDERSPENDS

Consideration was given to the report which recommended to Cabinet that all remaining Community Empowerment Fund underspends from the 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years that are not allocated by 30th September 2024, be returned to the General Fund.

The report also recommended that in future financial years, any Community Empowerment Fund underspends from the previous financial year that are not allocated by 30th September each year will be returned to the General Fund.

Cabinet noted that there have been significant underspends in some Wards over the past three years and understood that these funds need to be allocated by 30th September or be returned to the General Fund, clarification was sought on what would be considered to be allocated funds. The Policy Officer clarified that applications that are submitted by the 30th September and that are eligible will be funded from the underspends. This would be on a ward-by-ward basis, as not every Ward has the underspends. The Officer advised Cabinet that this closing date has been extended from 30th August 2024.

Cabinet sought further information on what support the Authority provides charities to apply for the funding. The Officer explained that there is a range of support offered, such as a dedicated page on the Council's website that has all the relevant information. The Authority works closely with GAVO. Local Ward Members were also made aware of the scheme and their responsibility to work with and find projects and set up new groups within their communities that could benefit. Unfortunately, no new groups have been set up which has resulted certain Wards have not taken advantage of the scheme.

Cabinet noted the comments made by the Officer and sought clarification on whether there has been any training given to the Local Ward Members to assist the groups and charities. The Officer assured Members that when the scheme was first introduced there was sessions held to increase the awareness which all Councillors were invited. The Awareness sessions were also provided again following the last elections to ensure that all existing and new Councillors had the opportunity to attend. Officers have also attended Town Council meetings to promote the scheme.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms confirmation and verbal vote, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for reasons contained within the Officers report:

1. All remaining Community Empowerment Fund underspends from the 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years that are not allocated by 30th September 2024, be returned to the General Fund.
2. In Future financial years, any Community Empowerment Fund underspends from the previous financial year that are not allocated by 30th September each year, be returned to the General Fund.

7. HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT CONSULTATION

Consideration was given to the report which sought Cabinet approval to commence a formal consultation with all relevant stakeholders and interested parties, in respect of a change to the provision of mainstream school transport.

Cabinet queried if no safe routes were identified to a specific school for individuals that currently use free home to school transport would the Authority continue offering the service or will investment be made into creating safer routes. The Head of Infrastructure advised Members that it would need to be assessed which would be a separate project to assess all routes to ensure that they are safe and meet all the necessary criteria to be a safe route. If there were no safe route, then there would need to be a review on the most beneficial option.

Cabinet raised a query as why the costs for home to school transport have increased. The Team Leader for Integrated Transport advised Members that the costs have risen over previous years. However, there have been significant increases since the pandemic, with not just the increase in fuel costs but also the operational cost increases such as the cost of employment rising which has led to businesses providing the services having to increase their charges.

Responding to a query raised Cabinet were assured that pupils with additional learning needs or disabilities would still be eligible to receive free home to school transport.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms confirmation and verbal vote, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for reasons contained within the Officers report:

1. A six-week consultation period with all relevant stakeholders and interested parties on the provision of transport in line with the relevant statutory distance criteria as set out by Welsh Government for all learners (English medium, Welsh medium and Faith schools, both Primary and Secondary phase) be agreed
2. Cabinet receives a further report outlining the results and feedback from the consultation, an updated Integrated Impact Assessment and any other relevant information prior to making a determination.

8. AMALGAMATION OF HENDRE INFANTS AND JUNIOR SCHOOLS

Cabinet noted the report was considered at the Education and Social Services Committee on 16th July 2024.

Consideration was given to the report that sought Cabinet approval on the recommendation to proceed to consultation, in partnership with each Governing Body, in respect of the

amalgamation of Hendre Junior School and Hendre Infants School with effect from September 2025.

Cabinet sought confirmation that the schools were in agreement with the proposed amalgamation. The Place Shaping and Sustainable Communities for Learning Service Manager assured Members that the school is in agreement, and it was the Governing Bodies of both schools that had made the request for the amalgamation as they have been working together for some time.

The Chief Education Officer addressed Cabinet explaining the positive impacts the amalgamation would have on teachers and pupils. The Officer assured Cabinet that the schools were excited about the amalgamation and believed it would have only positive impacts on the local community and the children.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms confirmation and verbal vote, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for reasons contained within the Officers report:

1. The contents of the report be noted.
2. The recommendation, via vote, to proceed to consultation, in partnership with each Governing Body, in respect of the amalgamation of Hendre Junior School and Hendre Infants School with effect from September 2025 be approved.

9. PROPOSAL FOR THE CLOSURE OF RHYDRI PRIMARY SCHOOL

Cabinet noted the report was considered at the Education and Social Services Committee on 16th July 2024.

Consideration was given to the report which sought Cabinet approval on the recommendation to proceed to consultation in respect of the closure of Rhydri Primary School with effect from July 2025. The report also ensured that Cabinet were apprised of the rationale for the proposal and relay the views of the Head Teacher and School Governing Body.

Cabinet sought assurance that everything had been done to avoid the closure of the school.

The Chief Education Officer advised Cabinet that the LA have been supporting the school since 2014 when after their advice the school collaborated with Bedwas Junior school to have the expertise to bring them out of special measures. At this time the schools' finances were also looking unhealthy. The collaboration was extremely successful, and there was a rise in intake at the school. Unfortunately, following this the numbers started to fall again. The school had access to a lot of support from the finance team. In 2023, it was apparent that the school was heading towards a deficit that they were unable to control. The Chair and Vice Chair of the governing body and head teacher approached the LA for a solution. Unfortunately, after trying everything the number of pupils were too low. The LA recommended working with just two classes as this would be financially viable. A visit was arranged to West Wales where this set up was working successfully and the quality of education delivered was not being compromised. The teachers were very positive about the recommended approach and felt this would be achievable. The Governing Body was also onboard in order to rebuild the school and increase the pupil intake. However, the parents had concerns regarding the standard of education the children would receive and the Governing Body decided not to take this approach. The Governing Body were made aware that without the change in how the school operates then the school's future would be in jeopardy.

The Officer felt the LA had supported the school as much as possible and felt that Members of the Governing Body would also feel the same.

Cabinet queried how much deficit the school is in and what recovery plan would be required to go forward. The Head of Education Planning and Strategy and Programme Director explained that the school have submitted with the assistance of the finance team a deficit budget of £175,000 for the financial year 24/25. When a school sets a deficit budget there needs to be an action plan set in place to bring the school back into a surplus budget within 3 years. Unfortunately, Rhydri Primary School were unable to achieve this, despite the Authority approving extension for a further two years.

Cabinet noted that a parent had suggested that the Council waiver the deficit and queried whether this was something that would be acceptable. The Officer explained that there is a 'Fair Funding' methodology that is used for every school which is a very transparent and open process. Therefore, each school's funding is fair and on the same basis. Additional funding to individual schools outside this funding methodology is not achievable with the fair processes that are currently in place.

Cabinet noted that there were a number of pupils at Rhydri Primary school with additional learning needs and queried whether this school could become a specialist ALN facility within the Borough. The Chief Education Officer advised that this has been discussed in the past. However, currently the Council's strategy is to seek placements in mainstream schools, which provides the learner with more opportunities to integrate, and this also provides a way of reducing surplus spaces and assist budgets.

Cabinet requested further information on how many pupils attending the school in 2023 were within the catchment area and how many remained in the catchment area at the end of July 2024. The Place Shaping and Sustainable Communities for Learning Service Manger advised that 59% of the pupils that attended the school in 2023 lived within the catchment area. The Officer advised that currently there are 39 pupils anticipated to attend the school in September of which 21% live within the catchment area. However, there have been a number of requests for children to transfer to alternative schools, so it is anticipated this number will fall.

Cabinet sought further information on how pupils would be supported transitioning to alternative schools. The Chief Education Officer advised that transitional support would be very complex. However, it would be guaranteed that the approach would be customised to each individual. The Officer also assured Cabinet that all staff would also receive a high standard of support.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms confirmation and verbal vote, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for reasons contained within the Officers report:

1. The contents of this report be noted.
2. The recommendation, via vote, to proceed to consultation on the proposal to close Rhydri Primary School with effect from July 2025 be approved.

10. TEAM CAERPHILLY - PLACE SHAPING

Cabinet noted the report was considered at Joint Scrutiny on 18th July 2024.

Consideration was given to the report which updated Cabinet on the current Place Shaping Programme and sought Cabinet approval on the recommendations regarding the allocation of

funding to individual projects.

Cabinet noted that the proposed £9 million investment would create match funding of £27 million and queried whether this would bring long-term benefits for the Borough and future savings. The Place Shaping and Sustainable Communities for Learning Service Manager advised that the match funding would allow us to maximise the impact of the investment in Caerphilly and there will also be savings for example the removal of backlog maintenance in some of the schools.

Cabinet highlighted that they are aware of budget cuts and are conscious that the public will be asking how the LA can invest £9m into the placeshaping programme in such a difficult financial climate. The Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer advised that although savings do need to be made it is also important to look to the future and invest in the Council's infrastructure to enable delivery of key priorities moving forward. The Officer also stressed that the investment of £9m would lever in £27m of external funding. He also added that the savings the Authority needs to make were for the revenue budget not capital, and that capital money could not be used for revenue savings.

Following a request from Cabinet the Corporate Director of Economy and Environment advised Members that Caerphilly County Borough were the first Local Authority in Wales to set a place making town centre plan, which was Caerphilly Town Centre. It was so successful the Welsh Government use this as the blueprint and insist on town centre place plans being in place and are a requirement for Local Authorities to access transforming towns funding.

Responding to a query raised the Director confirmed that there are measures within the programme that will assist to mitigate issues caused by climate change and highlighted that one of the largest impacts comes from rain fall and flooding, which have two schemes within the programme dedicated to these factors. The Director explained that putting money into these schemes' levers in 85% of WG funding.

Cabinet sought clarification on whether there are long term financial benefits to modern schools compared to old schools. The Head of Education Planning and Strategy and Programme Director confirmed that the older schools become the greater the maintenance costs. All modern schools are carbon neutral, therefore, saving on energy in the future. The Officer explained that the new schools are not just schools but are also used as part of the wider community, they are used for childcare facilities and wider community use. The investment brings more to the community than just a school.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms confirmation and verbal vote, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for reasons contained within the Officers report:

1. The information contained in the report be noted.
2. The recommendation, via vote, to utilise £9.211m of unallocated capital funding to support the progression of the projects set out in 5.5.8 be approved.
3. £7.202m of the unallocated capital be set aside as contingency for the overall Capital Programme be agreed.

11. FOOD HYGIENE RATING (WALES) ACT 2013 - PROPOSED INCREASE IN RE-RATING FEE

Consideration to the report which informed Cabinet of the review of the mandatory fee for businesses submitting re-rating applications under the Food Hygiene Rating (Wales) Act 2013 and associated Regulations and to seek approval for a revised re-rating fee.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms confirmation and verbal vote, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that or reasons contained within the Officers report:

1. The increase of the food hygiene re-rating visit fee to £255 with effect from 1st October 2024 be approved.
2. That any future revisions to the food hygiene re-rating visit fee as a result of an all-Wales review are agreed by the Director or Head of Service in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member be approved.

The meeting closed at 14:06 p.m.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 18th September 2024.

Chair