



EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY 3RD SEPTEMBER 2024 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor B. Miles - Chair

Councillors:

C. Bishop, A. Broughton-Pettit, P. Cook, M. Evans, A. Farina-Childs, C. Gordon, T. Heron, J. Roberts, and J Winslade.

Cabinet Members:

Councillors C. Andrews (Education and Communities), and E. Forehead (Social Care).

Together with:

Officers: G. Jenkins (Interim Corporate Director of Social Services), K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy), A. West (Place Shaping and Sustainable Communities for Learning Service Manager), C Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer) and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance:

Councillor J. Pritchard, C. Parry (Lewis School Pengam), L. Denton (Lewis Girls School), and co-opted Members M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan Commission for Education Representative), and T. Millington (Parent Governor Representative).

RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair 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](#).

At the start of the meeting, the Chair noted that this would be the last meeting for two of the co-opted Members, Mr M. Western and Mrs T. Millington, as they would have reached the end of their term of office at the end of September 2024. The Chair thanked both co-opted Members for their commitment and wished them well for the future.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from D. Street (Deputy Chief Executive), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), Councillors E.M. Aldworth, M. Chacon-Dawson, D. Cushing, A. Leonard, T. Parry J. Simmonds and S. Skivens, K. Woodland and co-opted Members, K. Cole (NEU), P. Ireland (NEU), and D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor C. Bishop declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 9. Federation of Schools – Cwmaber Infants School and Cwmaber Junior School as she is a school governor at one of the schools affected.

As this was a prejudicial interest Councillor C. Bishop left the meeting and did not take part in the debate. Details are also minuted with the respective item.

3. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 16TH JULY 2024.

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 16th July 2024, be approved as a correct record. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal communication, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 16th July 2024 (minute nos. 1 – 10) be approved as a correct record.

4. SPECIAL EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 23RD JULY 2024.

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd July 2024, be approved as a correct record. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal communication, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Special Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 23rd July 2024 (minute nos. 1 – 6) be approved as a correct record.

5. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CALL-IN PROCEDURE.

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

6. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The report informed the Committee of the Forward Work Programme planned for the period September 2024 to March 2025. The Committee was also advised that there would be a Special meeting on 3rd December 2024.

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

RESOLVED that the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme as appended to the meeting papers, be published on the Council's website.

7. CABINET REPORTS

It was confirmed that there had been no requests for any of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda to be brought forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

8. **POST 16, SINGLE SEX AND SURPLUS PLACES BOARD – CONSULTATION REPORT: PROPOSAL TO CLOSE LEWIS GIRLS SCHOOL AND MAKE A REGULATED ALTERATION TO LEWIS SCHOOL PENGAM.**

Councillor C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education and Communities) introduced the report which updated Members in respect of the Post 16, Single Sex and Surplus Places Board recommendation to close Lewis Girls School and make a regulated alteration to Lewis School Pengam to change from single sex to co-education with effect from September 2025.

Members were advised that the proposal went to formal consultation between the 3rd June 2024 and the 15th July 2024, and to discharge the Councils' duty under the School Organisation Code 2018, there is now a requirement for Cabinet Members to give due regard to the content of the Consultation Report and determine whether or not it is appropriate to move to the next stage in the process.

Members were referred to the Consultation Report attached as an annex, which summarised each of the issues raised by consultees, and were advised that any emerging themes that have been raised through gathering the views of consultees during the consultation process, have been responded to by means of clarification with supporting reasons.

Members were also advised of the details and percentages of the consultation responses which were included in the consultation report.

A Member sought further detail on the anticipated number of years the Lewis Girls School site will remain open if the proposals go ahead and the financial impact of this transition period. Members were advised that the consultation report details an anticipated two-year transition period with a detailed breakdown of how the transition will take place. This shows where certain year groups would attend Lewis Girls school site and Lewis school Pengam. With regard to the financial impact, Members were informed that the funding formula for the premises costs for the two schools would remain during the two-year period, therefore there would be no impact on the schools during the transition. The ambition for the local authority and both head teachers is for a smooth transition.

A Member referred to the catchment areas table in the consultation report which included the distances to other schools. The Member sought clarification on which point the distance to other schools was taken from. It was explained that both the catchment area and the distances are taken from Lewis School Pengam, and this is included because Welsh Government request that the impact on nearby schools is considered for this type of consultation.

Members noted that concerns were raised in the responses about the phased approach and the timeline, and queried what the main concerns were. The scrutiny committee was advised that respondents felt it is important that pupils are supported during the transition period, some mentioned that children are mixed at primary school level therefore it would be better to transition from primary to secondary with all their peer group.

Members were advised that if the decision is made by Cabinet to progress to statutory notice, a further report would be brought to both Scrutiny and Cabinet. If Cabinet then make the final decision to progress with the proposal a team around the school would be established to provide support not only to the staff and pupils but everyone at the school to ensure that they are supported during the transition.

Members received assurances from Mr Parry, Head of Lewis school Pengam, that up to this point, their role was to facilitate the consultation and ensure that as many people as possible had the opportunity to participate. They now have an indication of the views, and the next step is to manage any concerns if the closure proceeds. He made reference to the existing partnership work between the two schools for the sixth forms, which has demonstrated to the community how well they can work together.

Mr Parry also stated that there was nothing in the consultation responses that caused huge concern, and he has every confidence that the staff in both schools can address the issues raised.

Ms Denton, Head of Lewis Girls school, agreed with the points raised and stated that the emerging themes in the consultation responses did not have any surprises and that she is confident that both the local authority and the schools' staff working in partnership can put plans in place to address them.

A Member queried the recent Estyn report and was advised that no concerns were raised by Estyn during the inspection, and they may just require more detailed information on the consultation. Members were advised that further clarification would be sought from Estyn as to any additional information required for future consultations. The Member also queried the current provision at the Sue Noakes Leisure Centre and whether this would be impacted if Lewis Girls School closes. Members were advised that the site would continue to be used for the proposed two-year transition period, and that when it is no longer needed for educational purposes it would no longer be in their remit for such decisions on future use.

Following consideration of the information contained in the Consultation Report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal communication, this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

To proceed to Statutory Notice in relation to the proposal to close Lewis Girls School and make a Regulated Alteration to Lewis School Pengam to change from single sex to co-education with effect from September 2025.

9. FEDERATION OF SCHOOLS – CWMABER INFANTS SCHOOL AND CWMABER JUNIOR SCHOOL.

Councillor C. Bishop declared a prejudicial interest as she is a school governor at one of the schools affected. As this was a prejudicial interest Councillor C. Bishop left the meeting and did not take part in the debate.

Councillor C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education and Communities) introduced the report which consulted with Members in respect of the proposed federation of Cwmaber Infants School and Cwmaber Junior School, with effect from the start of term January 2025, in their formal capacity as statutory consultees. The report identified the Schools and Governing Bodies who wished to proceed to formal consultation in partnership with the Local Authority, and Members were advised that approval to proceed to consultation stage was received from Cabinet on 5th June 2024.

Members were informed that the consultation process is proceeding in line with the requirements of Welsh Government's Federation of Maintained School in Wales Regulations 2014, and that the consultation period for the proposal commenced on the 2nd of September 2024 and ends at midnight on the 1st of October 2024.

A Member noted that the report stated that there will not be enough positions for the current school governors for the new school, but the additional governors can be co-opted until re-alignment. The Member queried how many governors will be accommodated and will they be offered vacancies in other schools to retain the skills and experience. Members were advised that if the proposals are supported the new school will have 18 school governors, however if there are still additional governors those governors can still remain so that the schools do not lose their knowledge and expertise, but they will not have any voting rights. The school governing body membership will be established in the first meeting of the new governing body. The current Governors have agreed not to fill any vacancies until this process is finalised. Any school governors who wish to become Governors at different schools will be provided with advice on how this can be done if required.

The Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee noted the information contained in the report and consultation pack, and provided their views as part of the consultation process for the proposal which will be noted as part of the minutes of this meeting and included in the Consultation Summary Report which will be presented to Cabinet as part of the decision-making process.

10. SCHOOL ORGANISATION CODE 2018 – PROPOSAL FOR THE AMALGAMATION OF HENDRE JUNIOR SCHOOL AND HENDRE INFANTS SCHOOL.

Councillor C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education and Communities) introduced the report which consulted with Members on the proposed amalgamation of Hendre Junior School and Hendre Infants School, with effect from September 2025, in their formal capacity as statutory consultees. Members were advised that the report identified the Schools and Governing Bodies who wished to proceed to formal consultation in partnership with the Local Authority, and that approval to proceed to consultation stage was received from Cabinet on the 24th of July 2024.

Members were informed that the consultation process is proceeding in line with the requirements of Welsh Government Statutory Code document no 011/2018 – School Organisation Code 2nd Edition 2018, where exemptions do not apply, and the consultation period for the proposal commenced on the 2nd of September 2024 and ends at midnight on the 15th of October 2024.

A Member queried the financial impact if the proposal goes ahead. Members were informed that the funding formula will change and there will be a reduction in funding. Officers have visited the school governing bodies to explain the impact and the additional benefits, and the school governing bodies voted to proceed.

A Member referred to the disbenefits mentioned in the report and sought further information on the size of the school in comparison with other schools, if the proposals proceed. Members were advised that the current school admission numbers for both schools are between 40-44 pupils, and that there are several schools in the area with higher admission figures. Members were informed of examples of different schools' levels of admission numbers, with some schools as low as 19 and others as high as 89. There are also falling rolls across both schools and these proposals will allow the school the flexibility to move staff across the two sites and utilise areas in the school in other ways to look to reduce their surplus places.

The Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee noted the information contained in the report and consultation pack, and provided their views as part of the consultation process for the proposal which will be noted as part of the minutes of this meeting and included in the

Consultation Report which will be presented to Cabinet as part of the decision-making process.

The meeting closed at 6.08 pm.

Approved as a correct record, subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 15th October 2024.

CHAIR