



CABINET - 11TH DECEMBER 2024

SUBJECT: SCHOOL ORGANISATION CODE 2018 - CONSULTATION REPORT: PROPOSAL FOR THE CLOSURE OF RHYDRI PRIMARY SCHOOL

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update Members in respect of the proposed closure of Rhydri Primary School with effect from July 2025.
- 1.2 Members are asked to consider the information contained in the Consultation Report and approve the recommendations, via vote, to proceed to Statutory Notice.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Due to the falling rolls at Rhydri Primary school which are projected to decrease further in future years, meetings were arranged by the Head Teacher and the Governing body with Local Authority representatives including the Chief Education Officer, to discuss the future viability of the school.
- 2.2 The conclusion of the meeting held on 14th March 2024, agreed the school could no longer maintain a balanced budget, therefore a decision was made by the Governing Body of the School to pursue closure of Rhydri Primary School with effect from July 2025.
- 2.3 Approval to proceed to consultation was received from Cabinet on 24th July 2024 and the formal consultation ran between the 9th September 2024 and the 22nd October 2024.
- 2.4 To discharge the Council's 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.

- 2.5 A Consultation Report has been compiled and attached as an annex to this report. The Consultation Report summarises each of the issues raised by consultees. 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.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Cabinet Members are asked to:

- a) Consider the information contained in the Consultation Report
- b) Approve the recommendation, via vote, to proceed to Statutory Notice in relation to the proposal to close Rhydri Primary School with effect from July 2025.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To seek Members approval on the recommendations, via vote, to proceed to the publication of a Statutory Notice in respect of the proposal.
- 4.2 Assist the Council in discharging its duties in line with the requirements of the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code 2018.

5. THE REPORT

5.1 Rhydri Primary School

- 5.1.1 Rhydri Primary School provides education to pupils between the ages of 3 and 11 and has a published capacity figure of 91 places with a published admission number of 13.
- 5.1.2 At time of writing the Consultation Document, the number of pupils anticipated to attend the school in September 2024, was 39 pupils (31 Full Time and 8 Part Time) with 79% of these pupils residing outside of the catchment area of the school. However, the actual number of pupils attending the school as of September 2024, is now confirmed as 38 pupils (30 Full Time and 8 Part Time).
- 5.1.3 The projected pupil numbers and resultant financial outlook for the school provides a significant challenge to the Head and School Governors to agree a balanced budget to maintain the school and an appropriate staffing level which has led to a request to the local authority to consider closing the school from July 2025.
- 5.1.4 Under the School Funding (Wales) Regulations 2010, Individual school budgets are determined using a locally agreed funding formula in accordance

with factors which are learner led. Schools must be able to demonstrate via a financial action plan that the school will work to deliver a balanced budget. However, the Head Teacher and Governing Body have acknowledged that Rhydri Primary School is facing a significant financial deficit with pupil numbers projected to further decrease moving forward.

- 5.1.5 Reasonable alternatives to closure, which included reduction in the number of classes and federation with Bedwas Junior School have already been implemented by the Head Teacher and Governing Body in partnership with the Local Authority but deemed not viable or sustainable moving forward.
- 5.1.6 Further to Cabinet approval gained on 24th July 2024, formal consultation for the proposal was carried out between the 9th September 2024 and the 22nd October 2024
- 5.1.7 A prescribed list of recipients as outlined in the School Organisation Code 2018 were written to and a consultation document was published in Welsh and English, both in hardcopy and electronically via the Authority's website based. Reasonable access to information was promoted from an Equalities perspective and other formats were available, including a child friendly version.
- 5.1.8 Members of the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee who met on the 15th October 2024 in their capacity as a consultee under the School Organisation Code 2018, had the opportunity to consider the information contained in the consultation pack and provide their views which have been noted as part of the minutes of the meeting and summarised in the Consultation Report.
- 5.1.9 The consultation period ran for 42 days (with at least 20 of these being school days) to provide adequate time for response and conscientious consideration has been given to any responses received.
- 5.1.10 There were 52 responses received in respect of the proposal as outlined in 1.1. In addition, a number of pupils from the school were engaged in the consultation process through 'learner voice' sessions which have been reported on separately. These are broken down into more detail in the Consultation Report.
- 5.1.11 A Consultation Report has been compiled and has been attached as an annex to this report. The Consultation Report summarises each of the issues raised by consultees. 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. In addition, Estyn has provided a formal response in consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal which is included in the Consultation Report.
- 5.1.12 The Consultation Report will be published electronically on the Sustainable Communities for Learning pages on the Council's website.

5.1.13 Consultees who have indicated in their consultation response that they wish to be notified will be advised by letter or email of the availability of the Consultation Report along with the key stakeholders identified in the School Organisation Code 2018.

5.2 Conclusion

Pursuant to the requirements of the School Organisation Code 2018, formal consultation has now concluded in relation to this proposal and this report has been compiled along with the Consultation Report to provide members with the necessary information to make an informed decision as to whether to progress the proposal to the next statutory stage which would entail permission to publish a Statutory Notice. The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, provides that anyone wishing to make objections to a school organisation proposal has the opportunity to do so at this stage. An Objection Report will then be brought before Cabinet in addition to an updated Integrated Impact Assessment, and at this point, a final determination regarding the proposal will be requested.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

6.1 No assumptions have been made in relation to this report. The process outlined by Welsh Government is being adhered to ensure transparency, balanced and open decision making.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 A full Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) has been completed in relation to the proposal to ensure compliance with the socio-economic duty, Sections 1 to 3 of Equality Act 2010.

[Link to IIA](#)

7.2 Subject to Cabinet approval to progress to Statutory Notice, the IIA will be further reviewed and updated after this stage. The purpose of this further assessment is to take account of any further information that has come forward through the consultation stages or otherwise, to further support conscientious consideration prior to final determination.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Under the School Funding (Wales) Regulations 2010, Individual school budgets are determined using a locally agreed funding formula in accordance with factors which are learner led.

- 8.2 Schools must be able to demonstrate via a financial action plan that the school will work to deliver a balanced budget.
- 8.3 The Council's Education Finance Team have been working closely with the school for a number of years, however, the Head Teacher and Governing Body have acknowledged that Rhydri Primary School is facing a significant financial deficit with pupil numbers projected to further decrease moving forward and are unable to demonstrate via a financial action plan their ability to reverse the deficit.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 This will be dependent on specific proposals and will be considered as part of the consultation process.
- 9.2 The Council's Human Resources Team will work closely with all relevant parties to ensure that processes are adhered to, and support is provided as required.

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 The proposal was presented to the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee at their meeting of the 26th November 2024 and considered as Item 8 of the agenda.

Following consideration of 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.

RESOLVED to:

Endorse the recommendation to Cabinet, via vote, to proceed to Statutory Notice in relation to the proposal to close Rhydri Primary School with effect from July 2025.

Vote: Unanimous (agreed)

11. STATUTORY POWER

Author: Andrea West, Place Shaping and Sustainable Communities for Learning Service Manager

Consultees:

Dave Street, Interim Chief Executive
Richard Edmunds, Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services
Mark S Williams, Corporate Director for Economy and Environment

Councillor Carol Andrews, Cabinet Member for Education and Communities
Councillor Donna Cushing, Chair of Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee
Councillor Brenda Miles, Vice Chair of Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee
Sue Richards, Head of Education Planning and Strategy / Place Shaping Programme Director
Stephen Harris, Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer
Keri Cole, Chief Education Officer
Sarah Ellis, Lead for Inclusion and ALN
Sarah Mutch, Early Years Manager
Paul Warren, Strategic Lead for School Improvement
Jane Southcombe, Financial Services Manager
Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services
Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer
Ben Winstanley, Head of Land and Property Services
Steve Pugh, Corporate Communications Manager

Background Papers:

[Link to Consultation Report – Rhydri Primary School](#)