



**CABINET
MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE AND
VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON
WEDNESDAY 11TH DECEMBER 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 (Interim Chief Executive), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services) and M.S. Williams (Corporate Director of Economy and Environment).

Also in Attendance:

R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), L. Lane (Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer), L. Sykes (Deputy Head of Financial Services and Deputy S151 Officer), K. Peters (Corporate Policy Manager), J. Pearce (Business Improvement Officer), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy and Programme Director) A. West (Place Shaping and Sustainable Communities for Learning Service Manager), Lynne Donovan (Head of People Services), L. Allen (Finance Manager, Housing), S O'Donnell (Principal Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rate Officer), L. Thomas (Place Shaping and Sustainable Communities for Learning Manager), S. Ellis (Lead for Inclusion and ALN), P. Warren (Strategic Lead for School Improvement), N. Chapman (Human Resources Manager), C. Jenkins (Human Resources Manager), N. Taylor Williams (Head of Housing), and J. Green (Committee Services Officer).

Also Present:

Ms C. Webber (Teacher at Lewis Girls School, Pengam - speaking on agenda item 5) Mrs L. Denton (Headteacher at Lewis Girls School, Pengam) and C. Parry (Headteacher at Lewis School, Pengam).

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 G. Jenkins Interim Corporate Director for Social Services.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

The following Councillors declared a personal interest in relation to **Agenda Item 9 Housing Revenue Account Charges - 2025/2026.**

Councillor C. Andrews in that a relative for whom she has power of attorney is a Council Tenant.

Councillor N. George in that he is a Garage Tenant.

Councillor E. Stenner in that a relative is a Garage Tenant.

Councillor P. Leonard in that a relative is a Garage Tenant.

As these were personal interests only, there was no requirement for Councillors to leave the meeting and could take full part in the debate and vote.

3. **MINUTES – THURSDAY 14TH NOVEMBER 2024.**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the special meeting held on the 14th November 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 April 2025.

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

Consideration was given to the report which provided Cabinet with an update 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.

The Leader of Council welcomed Ms Webber Trade Union Representative at Lewis Girls School to Cabinet and invited her to speak on the report.

Ms Webber addressed Cabinet to strongly object to the proposed closure of Lewis Girls school and explained that their main concern was that Lewis Girls school had consistently outperformed Lewis School Pengam in terms of pupil achievement and had also received a positive Estyn inspection. Ms Webber felt that closing a high-performing school and transferring pupils to an underperforming school could be detrimental the educational achievement of pupils particularly GCSE results. Ms Webber expressed disappointment that the consultation process, Pupil Voice, had only included Primary School children and had excluded the voices of Secondary School children who would be directly impacted by the proposed closure and expressed further concerns in relation to the consultation process with regards to teaching staff. Ms Webber also emphasised concerns regarding the timeline for the closure of the school and the transfer process together with the financial position of Lewis School Pengam.

The Leader of Council thanked Ms Webber and invited the Headteachers of Lewis Girls School and Lewis School Pengam to provide Cabinet with their comments.

Mr C. Parry, Headteacher of Lewis School Pengam addressed Cabinet and talked passionately about his time working at the school and his vision for the future and acknowledged the importance of working together with staff from both schools. He explained how they would seek to take on board the best practices of both schools and take them forward as models for improvement. Mr. Parry explained the budgetary position of the school and confirmed that he had taken the necessary steps to address those budgetary concerns. He acknowledged the uncertainty that existed for staff at both schools particularly around the timeline and job security and assured Cabinet that he would do his best to alleviate their anxieties. Mr Parry emphasised that where they had been opportunities to meet with Trade Union Representative it was made clear that they did not foresee a situation currently where job losses were a factor. In fact, he envisaged this to be a recruitment situation rather than a job loss situation.

Mr Parry expressed how proud he was of the staff from both schools and their passion for their pupils and for teaching and expressed his optimism that combining these two schools would be positive for the community, pupils and families that will be served by this proposals and felt that at some point in the future the creation of a single joint school would unlock the potential for pupils and provide opportunities in this valley that had been previously seen.

Mrs L. Denton the Headteacher at Lewis Girls school addressed Cabinet and reflected on the passion of the teachers from Lewis Girls school which had been represented at Cabinet by Ms Webber, along with the support of the teaching colleagues attending in the public gallery. Mrs Denton acknowledged that times had changed, and the profiles of the individual schools had also changed and referenced the loyalty and the expertise that was evident today. Mrs Denton acknowledged the anxiety of staff over the timeline of the proposal but also expressed her confidence that this was achievable because of that loyalty and expertise of the teaching staff and working together would only enhance that.

The Leader of Council thanked Ms Webber, Mr Parry and Ms Denton and Cabinet Members were afforded the opportunity to ask questions of Officers.

Responding to a query raised the Place Shaping and Sustainable Communities for Learning Service Manager confirmed that Lewis School has the capacity to accommodate 1350 pupils.

Clarification was sought on whether the concerns of staff from Lewis Girls school regarding the impact the school closure would have on GCSE results were valid. The Headteacher of Lewis School Pengam advised Cabinet that the proposal going forward is that year 11 pupils at both schools would remain in a single sex setting, so there would be minimum disruption.

The Headteacher for Lewis Girls school advised with the two sets of expertise coming together she did not envisage the GCSE results being adversely affected in any way because staffing would remain quite constant and was therefore confident that standards would remain the same.

The Strategic Lead for School Improvement confirmed that the Local Authority had every confidence in the leadership of the schools to work together to ensure that there is a smooth transition. The LA must ensure that there is the right support and expertise in place within the school and if required external support would be provided.

Responding to a query raised by a Cabinet Member the Place Shaping and Sustainable Communities for Learning Service Manager confirmed that the Lewis Schools scenario was the last active single sex schools within Wales.

A Cabinet Member sought assurance that all teaching staff from both schools had been consulted on the proposal. Officers assured Cabinet that the staff were a prescribed consultee within both documents. Therefore, the consultation document and the statutory notice links were sent to both schools to ensure staff were part of the process. The Officer confirmed that 13% of the respondents were staff. The Officer also clarified that the pupil voice is extremely important and gave Cabinet assurance that both secondary and primary school pupils were also consulted on the proposal and the Head of Lewis Girls school had confirmed that pupils took part in the consultation session held at the school.

Ms Webber on behalf of the staff at Lewis Girls school expressed their disappointment that Officers had not gone into the schools to talk to pupil's face to face and explained this sentiment was also shared by staff in terms of the consultation approach taken with them.

The Head of Peoples Services outlined the consultation process and confirmed that the LA had followed the Welsh Government guidance. However, after speaking to staff and hearing how disappointed they were that they hadn't been spoken to personally, it was something the LA had taken on board, and should this situation happen in the future they would ensure that this forms part of the consultation process.

Following a query raised by Cabinet the Officer confirmed that Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee were fully supportive of the proposal.

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

RESOLVED that for reasons contained within the Officers report:

1. Consideration was given to the information contained in the Objection Report.
2. The recommendation, to proceed to implementation of 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 be approved.

6. SCHOOL ORGANISATION CODE 2018 - PROPOSAL FOR THE AMALGAMATION OF HENDRE JUNIOR SCHOOL AND HENDRE INFANTS SCHOOL.

Consideration was given to the report which provided Cabinet with an update in respect of the proposed amalgamation of Hendre Junior School and Hendre Infants School with effect from September 2025.

A Cabinet Member acknowledged that the school would operate over two sites and raised a query with regards what provision would be in place for safe access over both sites. The Place Shaping and Sustainable Communities for Learning Service Manager advised Cabinet that there were currently no proposals to change the sites. However, assurances were given that the sites were regularly visited from a health and safety perspective to identify any actions needed to improve safety and recently new fencing had been installed which had segregated part of the carpark in order to improve safety. The Officer assured Cabinet that both sites will continue to be reviewed in this way.

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

RESOLVED that for reasons contained within the Officers report:

1. Consideration was given to the information contained in the Consultation Report

2. The recommendation to proceed to Statutory Notice in relation to the proposed amalgamation of Hendre Junior School and Hendre Infants School with effect from September 2025 be approved.

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

Consideration was given to the report which provided Cabinet with an update in respect of the proposed federation of Cwmaber Infants School and Cwmaber Junior School, with effect from the start of term January 2025.

Responding to queries raised by Cabinet Members the Head of Education Strategy and Planning- Programme Director for Place-shaping, explained the differences between a federation and amalgamation of schools. The Officer highlighted that Headteachers and the Governing Bodies worked together to consider different ways of working that would provide the best outcomes at the different stages of the process depending on each school's circumstances. Cabinet was assured that this form of partnership working makes this a smooth, supported process that works for Governors, Headteachers and the Local Authority. The Officer also confirmed that should a federation be unsuccessful then a full consultation would need to be undertaken in order to defederate the schools.

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

RESOLVED that for reasons contained within the Officers report:

1. Consideration was given to the information contained in the Consultation Responses Report.
2. The recommendation to proceed to implementation of the federation of Cwmaber Infants School and Cwmaber Junior School, with effect from the start of term January 2025 be approved.

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

Consideration was given to the report which provided Cabinet with an update in respect of the proposed closure of Rhydri Primary School with effect from July 2025.

It was confirmed that Cabinet Members had read and considered the consultation responses.

A Cabinet Member had been approached by a Governor of Rhydri Primary school and requested that Officers respond to a concern that had been raised. The Governor stated that

'When Governors, Teachers and parents met in the public meetings in the summer of 2023, the LA advisors failed to warn them that a financial projection had to be calculated on projected Rhydri birth rates and not on the increased pupil numbers from outside Rh dri. The LA allowed the Governing Body, parents and Teachers to work on a proactive marketing campaign that was destined to be of no help to the financial protection. This was blatantly irresponsible of the LA, particularly as many unhappy ALN pupils did transfer schools the LA already knew that they would be closing the school shortly, owing to the birth rate figures.'

Responding to the comments of the Governor, the Head of Education Planning and Strategy and Programme Director clarified that herself and other Officers had been working with Rhydri Primary School for a number of years. Officers have attended Governor meetings and given

clear advice that in order to maximise the time available to be able to recover its financial position, they should drop to two classes. The advice given was clear and was based on the pupil projections on the birth rate. Hence the decision by the Governing Body to drop to two classes. Following that meeting there was a parent meeting where a number of Officers also attended and where again there was clear discussion around the way in which projections are made based on live birth rate. The Officer strongly felt that both the Governing Body and the parents had been provided with sufficient information and were fully aware of the way in which pupil projections were calculated. However, following the initial decision the Governing Body decided to go against the advice and decided not to drop to only two classes. The Officer also advised Cabinet that against the advice of the LA a campaign was started to attract pupils to the school. This was evidenced in the minutes of the meetings.

A Cabinet Member sought clarification on whether the majority of pupils attending Rhydri Primary School were from outside the Borough and if that was the case, does that mean that Caerphilly County Borough Taxpayers were paying for the education of children from other Counties.

The Place Shaping and Sustainable Communities for Learning Service Manager advised Cabinet the majority of children attending the school were from other areas within Caerphilly County Borough, that through the marketing campaign a number of these pupils had recently transferred to Rhydri. The Office further advised Cabinet that there were currently 30 full time pupils plus 8 part time nursery pupils attending the school.

Responding to a query raised the Head of Education Planning and Strategy and Programme Director advised Cabinet that a school that has a projected deficit balance is allowed three years to be able to turn that in a surplus balance to be able to balance their budget. However, with the approval of the S151 Officer, Rhydri had been given five years. They had been supported by the Finance Team to try and achieve a balanced budget over the past several years. However, this proved to be unachievable. The Officer was confident that the Council had done all it can to support the Governors and the school and considered every opportunity to keep the school from closing. Cabinet was also assured that staff and pupils would be supported and that parents can express a preference for any school they wish their child to attend and subject to availability they would be accommodated should the proposal to close be supported.

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

RESOLVED that for reasons contained within the Officers report:

1. Consideration was given to the information contained in the Consultation Report.
2. The recommendation, to proceed to Statutory Notice in relation to the proposal to close Rhydri Primary School with effect from July 2025 be approved.

9. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT CHARGES – 2025/2026.

Consideration was given to the report which sought Cabinet's views and approval on the increased Council Housing rent charges proposed.

Cabinet considered the views from the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting held on the 10th December 2024.

Cabinet noted the charges predominantly focused on council house rents, but also included garages, and were intended to be effective for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the 2025/2026 financial year.

Responding to a query raised by a Cabinet Member the Head of Housing explained that WG had extended its rent the policy for another year, whilst a new policy is developed. WG set the maximum permitted amount in September each year plus 1% i.e. 1.7% CPI in September 2024 plus 1%. Therefore, 2.7% was the maximum increase that the Council was permitted to raise rents and still be affordable across all properties.

A Cabinet Member queried whether Universal Credit would cover the increase in the rent charged for the majority of the contract holders. The Officer confirmed that 77% of the contract holders were in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit that would assist with covering rent payments.

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

RESOLVED that for reasons contained within the Officers report:

1. Consideration was given to the views from the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting held on the 10th December 2024.
2. Officers' recommendation to Cabinet for the following increases from April 2025 based on the options explained in the report be approved.
 - (i) Rent is increased per property to the maximum permitted as per the WG rent policy which is 2.7%. This would increase the current average gross rent by £2.87 per week from £106.44 to £109.31 per week over 52 weeks.
 - (ii) The level of rent for garages from April 2025 be increased by the same level at 2.7% from £9.44 per week to £9.69 per week, an increase of 25p per week.

10. COUNCIL TAX BASE 2025-2026.

Consideration was given to the report which sought Cabinet approval of the Council Tax Base for the 2025/26 financial year.

Cabinet were provided with details of the Council Tax base for 2025/26 for tax setting purposes and the collection percentage to be applied.

Responding to a query raised by a Cabinet Member the Principal Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rate Officer advised that there is a projected premium for long-term empty properties and second homes within the tax base which will be introduced from April 2025. There are a predicted 800 properties that will attract a premium. The Officer emphasised that this was only a projection. However, it does take into account the two largest categories of exceptions which will be properties for letting and for sale. The Officer explained that the revenue received would be used to help bring unused properties back into use and for some additional staffing resources.

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

RESOLVED that for reasons contained within the Officers report:

1. The Council Tax collection rate is maintained at 97.50% for the 2025/26 financial year be approved.
2. The Council Tax Base for 2025/26 be 62,675.70, with the Council Tax Base for

each community council area being outlined in paragraph 5.7 of the report be approved.

11. REVIEW OF THE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK 2023/2024.

Consideration was given to the report which set out the changes to the Council's Performance Management Framework (PMF).

Cabinet noted that the PMF is the mechanism that supports the Council's performance duties and allows leadership and members an insight into current performance against stated objectives and key organisational activities.

It was further noted the current PMF has been in place since 2019 and having reviewed the framework some improvements had been made in the information provided.

A Cabinet Member sought clarification on how often that data is updated to ensure that it is accurate. The Service Manager, Service Improvement and Partnerships clarified that the Organisation Performance Assessment (OPA) is updated every six months and reported to the Scrutiny Committee. The Officer explained that the OPA itself is a key document and forms part of the annual reporting cycle and that elements in it feed into the self-assessment and the report on the well-being objectives, which covers the Corporate Plan, and these are also reported at year end to Cabinet and the self-assessment elements also reported to Governance and Audit Committee.

A Cabinet Member queried whether the review would allow Joint Scrutiny to be able to challenge the performance of the Authority. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services confirmed that this would be the case and that the Authority is open in the indicators that are used and available to Members.

Having fully considered the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms confirmation this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for reasons contained within the Officers report

1. The proposed changes to the PMF were reviewed and thoughts and comments were offered on the new arrangements prior to its implementation.
2. The updated PMF for 2024/2025 onwards be signed off for approval.

12. PUBLIC INTEREST TESTS.

Cabinet considered the Public Interest Tests and concluded that on balance the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interests in disclosing the information and it was: -

RESOLVED that in accordance with Section 100(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting because of the likely disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 12 and 14 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

13. EXTENSION OF FLEXIBLE RETIREMENT ARRANGEMENT .

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for reasons contained with the Officers report recommendation 3.1 be agreed.

14. EXTENSION OF FLEXIBLE RETIREMENT ARRANGEMENT .

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for reasons contained with the Officers report recommendation 3.1 be agreed.

15. PENTREBANE STREET, CAERPHILLY – PROPOSED ADVANCED DEMOLITION WORKS.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for reasons contained with the Officers report recommendations 3.1 to 3.3 be approved.

The meeting closed at 2.50 p.m.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 22nd January 2025.

Chair
