



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 26TH NOVEMBER 2024 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor D. Cushing - Chair

Councillors:

E.M. Aldworth, C. Bishop, A. Broughton-Pettit, M. Chacon-Dawson, P. Cook, M. Evans, C. Gordon, T. Heron, B. Miles (Vice Chair), T. Parry, J. Roberts, J. Winslade, and K. Woodland.

Cabinet Members:

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

Together with:

Officers: R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), G. Jenkins (Interim Corporate Director of Social Services), J. Williams (Assistant Director Adult Services), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy), A. West (Place Shaping and Sustainable Communities for Learning Service Manager), J. Southcombe (Finance Manager), P. Warren (Strategic Lead for School Improvement), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), J. Green (Committee Services Officer) and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance:

C. Parry (Headteacher, Lewis School, Pengam), L. Denton (Headteacher, Lewis Girls School), and co-opted Members D. Bezzina (Parent Governor Representative), K. Stacey (Parent Governor Representative), and P. Ireland (NEU).

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](#).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A. Farina-Childs, A. Leonard, J. Simmonds, S. Skivens and co-opted Members K. Cole (NEU), and D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 15TH OCTOBER 2024.

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 15th October 2024, be approved as a correct record. By way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 15th October 2024 (minute nos. 1 – 8) be approved as a correct record.

4. 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.

5. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The report informed the Committee of the Forward Work Programme planned for the period November 2024 to March 2025.

Following consideration of the report, a report on school pupil exclusion was requested and it was moved and seconded that subject to this addition 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 amended, be published on the Councils' website.

6. CABINET REPORTS

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

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

7. 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.

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 asked to consider the information contained in the Objection Report and endorse the recommendations to Cabinet, via vote, to proceed to implementation. Cabinet

would then make a final determination on 11th December 2024 as to whether or not to implement the proposal following the process outlined in the School Organisation Code 2018 and supporting documentation.

Further to Cabinet approval gained 18th September 2024, a Statutory Notice for the proposal relating to Lewis Girls School and Lewis School Pengam was published, and the formal objection period ran between 26th September 2024 and 24th October 2024.

A Member referred to Pupil Well-Being in the Objection Report and the acknowledgement of the Council on the concerns raised. The Member queried whether any further information could be provided on the nature of the objections. Members were advised that the objections were in relation to the removal of the only single-sex schools in the Borough and concerns over the transition period for the pupils. Members were assured that regular meetings were taking place regarding the proposed changes, and it was hoped that minimal disruption would be affected over the 2-year period for the proposed transition, with constant support to staff and pupils throughout, which would continue going forward. The Member also queried the timeline for transition and where the existing teachers would relocate to from Lewis Girls School. Members were advised that until the final decision was made, formal plans would then be put in place to ensure a smooth transition.

A Member queried the level of morale of the teachers in both schools at this time, particularly in Lewis Girls School. Members were advised that morale was low at Lewis Girls due to the uncertainty and the timeline until a final decision was made and there were benefits and concerns for both sides of the proposal.

A Member asked if there were any proposed changes to the current catchment areas whilst not pre-empting the final decision. Members were advised that there were no proposed changes to the catchment area for the schools and that Lewis School could accommodate pupils from Lewis Girls as the school was built for 1350 pupils and currently there were 650 pupils attending.

The Headteacher of Lewis School Pengam clarified that if the proposal went ahead, classes from year 7 onwards would be mixed classes, with the exception of year 11 which would remain as single sex classes for the first year of the transition period.

Following consideration of the Objection Report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal communication (and in noting there were 15 For, 0 Against, and 1 Abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED to:

Endorse the recommendation to Cabinet, via vote, 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.

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

Councillor C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education and Communities) introduced the report which updated Members in respect of the proposed closure of Rhydri Primary School with effect from July 2025. Members were asked to consider the information contained in the Consultation Report and endorse the recommendations to Cabinet, via vote, to proceed to Statutory Notice.

Members were advised that due to the falling rolls at Rhydri Primary school which are projected to decrease further in future years, meetings were arranged by the Headteacher

and the Governing Body with Local Authority representatives including the Chief Education Officer, to discuss the future viability of the school.

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. Approval to proceed to consultation was received from Cabinet on 24th July 2024 and the formal consultation ran between 9th September 2024 and 22nd October 2024.

Following a query from a Member officers clarified that if the proposal went ahead, existing pupils could attend St. James Primary School, subject to parents' preference. A Member noted that St. James Primary School was currently 'in need of significant improvement' following their recent Estyn report and queried the level of information that would be available to potential new parents. Members were advised that St. James Primary School was already working towards the required improvements and an increase in pupil attendance, with reference made to the 'Team around the school' process and accelerated improvements also both acknowledged by Estyn.

A Member queried if St James Primary School was within Caerphilly County Borough Council area, and that any future proposed attendance at the school would be subject to parental preference. An Officer confirmed that the school was within Caerphilly County Borough Council and that attendance at the school would be subject to parental preference.

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.

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

Councillor C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education and Communities) introduced the report which updated Members in respect of the proposed federation of Cwmaber Infants School and Cwmaber Junior School, with effect from the start of term January 2025.

Members were asked to consider the information contained in the Consultation Responses Report and endorse the recommendations to Cabinet, via vote, to proceed to implementation. The consultation period for the proposal commenced on 2nd September 2024 and ended at midnight on 1st October 2024.

A Member noted the level of responses to the consultations and queried whether there were any plans to encourage more responses to future consultations. Members were advised that there was a prescribed list of consultees and thorough consultations are undertaken.

Following consideration of the Consultation Responses 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 the implementation of the federation of Cwmaber Infants School and Cwmaber Junior School, with effect from the start of term January 2025.

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 updated Members in respect of the proposed amalgamation of Hendre Junior School and Hendre Infants School with effect from September 2025.

Members were asked to consider the information contained in the Consultation Report and endorse the recommendations to Cabinet, via vote, to proceed to Statutory Notice. The consultation period for the proposal commenced on 2nd September 2024 and ended at midnight on 15th October 2024.

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

The meeting closed at 6.21 pm.

Approved as a correct record, subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 20th February 2025.

CHAIR