



## **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 11<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2025 AT 5.30 P.M.**

#### **PRESENT:**

Councillor D. Cushing - Chair

#### **Councillors:**

C. Bishop, A. Broughton-Pettit, M. Chacon-Dawson, P. Cook, A. Farina-Childs, C. Gordon, A. Leonard, T. Parry, J. Roberts, S. Skivens, J. Winslade, and K. Woodland.

#### **Cabinet Members:**

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

#### **Together with:**

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

#### **Also in attendance:**

Councillor J. Pritchard, and Co-opted Members D. Bezzina (Parent Governor Representative), and K. Stacey (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](#).

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E. M. Aldworth, M. Evans, T. Heron, B. Miles, J. Simmonds, and co-opted Members K. Cole (NEU), and D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association).

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor S. Skivens declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 6. School Organisation Code 2018 – Proposal for the Amalgamation of Hendre Junior School and Hendre Infants School. as he is a Community Councillor in that ward and personally knows staff working in the schools.

As this was a personal interest only there was no requirement for him to leave the meeting and he could take full part in the debate and vote. Details are also minuted with the respective item.

## **3. 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.

## **4. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The report informed the Committee of the Forward Work Programme planned for the period March 2025 to March 2026. Members were advised that the Sustainable Communities for Learning School Proposal (Ysgol Y Lawnt / Upper Rhymney Primary School) planned for 22nd April 2025 would be postponed and the future date would be confirmed.

Councillor E. Forehead (Cabinet Member for Social Care) also noted that the 'Notice of Motion – Caerphilly Fast Track HIV Region' listed for 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2025, should be amended, to remove Councillor Nigel George as the Cabinet Member listed and replaced with Councillor E. Forehead.

Following consideration of the report and noting that the Sustainable Communities for Learning School Proposal (Ysgol Y Lawnt / Upper Rhymney Primary School) planned for 22nd April 2025 will be postponed, 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 amended, be published on the Councils' website.

## **5. 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 report.

## **6. SCHOOL ORGANISATION CODE 2018 – PROPOSAL FOR THE AMALGAMATION OF HENDRE JUNIOR SCHOOL AND HENDRE INFANTS SCHOOL.**

Councillor S. Skivens declared a personal interest as he is a Community Councillor in that

ward and personally knows staff working in the schools. As this was a personal interest only there was no requirement for him to leave the meeting and he could take full part in the debate and vote.

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 advised that further to Cabinet approval gained on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2024, a Statutory Notice for the proposal relating to the amalgamation of Hendre Junior School and Hendre Infants School was published, and the formal objection period ran between 13<sup>th</sup> January 2025 and the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 2025.

Under Section 49 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 when objections have been received proposers must publish a summary of the statutory objections and the proposer's response to those objections ("the Objection Report"). No Objections were received during this period. As no statutory objections were received, there was no requirement to publish an Objection Report.

Members were informed that to discharge the Council's duty under the School Organisation Code 2018, there was now a requirement for Cabinet members to make a final determination as whether to implement the proposal as outlined in the documentation. Should Cabinet authorise progression of the project, a Decision Notice would be published setting out clearly the reasons for the decision with reference to the School Organisation Code 2018. The proposal would then progress to full implementation to amalgamate Hendre Junior School and Hendre Infants School with effect from September 2025.

There were no issues or concerns raised by Members of the scrutiny committee.

Following consideration of the information contained in the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal communication, (and in noting there were 14 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 amalgamate Hendre Junior School and Hendre Infants School with effect from September 2025.

## **7. 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. Further to Cabinet approval gained on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2024, a Statutory Notice for the proposal relating to the closure of Rhydri Primary School was published, and the formal objection period ran between 13<sup>th</sup> January 2025 and the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 2025.

Members were advised that Under Section 49 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 when objections have been received proposers must publish a summary of the statutory objections and the proposer's response to those objections ("the Objection Report"). 10 Objections were received via email and in the medium of English.

Members were also advised that to discharge the Council's duty under the School Organisation Code 2018, there was now a requirement for Cabinet members to give due regard to the content of the Objection Report and make a final determination as whether to

implement the proposal as outlined in the documentation. Should Cabinet authorise progression of the project, a Decision letter would be published setting out clearly the reasons for the decision with reference to the School Organisation Code 2018. The proposal would then progress to full implementation to close Rhydri Primary School with effect from July 2025 and as outlined in the Consultation Document and the Statutory Notice, the current catchment area for Rhydri Primary School would transfer to the catchment area of St James Primary School.

There were no issues or concerns raised by Members of the scrutiny committee.

Following consideration of the information contained in 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 13 For, 1 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 Rhydri Primary School and transfer its catchment area to that of St James Primary School with effect from July 2025.

## **8. 2024/25 SOCIAL SERVICES BUDGET MONITORING REPORT (MONTH 9).**

Councillor E. Forehead (Cabinet Member for Social Care) introduced the report which informed Members of projected revenue expenditure for Social Services for the 2024/25 financial year and its implications for the current and future financial years. Members were advised that the report would identify the reasons behind a projected underspend of £1,684k against a total Social Services budget for 2024/25 of £139,133k, inclusive of transport costs.

Members were also informed that this amounts to an increase in the projected underspend for the Directorate of £1,002k since month 7. However, the level of debt that has been owed to the Division for more than 12 months has increased significantly during the current financial year. If this outstanding debt cannot be collected before the end of the financial year, then we could require an increase in our bad debt provision, which in turn could offset the potential underspend currently forecast for the Adult Services Division. Work is ongoing to reduce the level of older debts, and the position will be reviewed at year-end to determine whether an increase in bad debt provision is appropriate and if so, how it could be funded.

A Member queried whether there was an increase in the cost of people needing care in their own homes. Members were advised that the difference between month 7 and month 9 was a result of the 2024/25 pay award to care staff exceeding the 4% that had been budgeted. The Member also queried whether there was any grant funding ringfenced for the specific purpose of asylum-seeking children. Members were advised that there were funding schemes from the Home Office and Welsh Government and were provided with details on the levels of these grants. Members were also advised that the funding does not cover the total costs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, of which CCBC currently funds 24 children, with the target being 38. Members were also advised that these children funded by CCBC, may be placed outside of the Borough due to their original temporary placements or where they may have connections in the UK.

A Member sought clarification on the appropriations from earmarked reserves and Members were advised that these were earmarked for social work training courses, with some staff being seconded to undertake a social work degree. Members were also advised that 'other costs' could include items such as furniture, equipment, IT, and insurance recharges.

A Member sought clarification on the current recruitment situation for the Gwent Frailty, and the underspend for service users. Members were advised that this information would be

sought and circulated to members following the meeting.

A Member sought an explanation of costs and the collection of sundry debtor payments. Members were advised that when individuals are placed in residential homes, the contract is between the provider and the local authority. The local authority pays the provider for the service and the service user pays an amount back to the local authority, depending on their income and assets. Discussion followed regarding the collection of unpaid balances owed by the service users.

A Member noted the 50-day integrated care winter challenge, including hospital discharges and queried when this would commence. Members were advised that this was currently being provided and noted that the finances should be spent before the end of the financial year.

A Member queried the projected underspend of 1.684k noted in the report. Members were advised that this would be lower by the end of the year if demand increases in the final quarter, but reference was also made to WG funding which could impact on the final balance. The Member also sought clarification on increased client contribution and members were advised that this was due to additional one-off receipts. Members were also advised that the deficit in residential care was due to the costs of children's care increasing.

A Member sought clarification on the underspend in the youth offending team and queried whether this was due to a reduction in staff. Members were advised that this was due to a reimbursement from reserves, which would have been paid into throughout the year. The Member queried whether the same applied to fostering and adoption, and members were advised that the child placement budget is managed as a whole and increased residential placements is likely to be offset by reduced demand for foster care.

Members noted the projected underspend of £1,684k in respect of the 2024/25 financial year.

Members noted the ongoing financial pressures for future financial years brought about by an underlying increase in demand for social care services.

Members noted that a review of older debts will be undertaken by the end of the current financial year to determine whether an increase in our bad debt provision is necessary.

## **9. EDUCATION BUDGET MONITORING 2024/25 (PERIOD 9).**

Councillor C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education and Communities) introduced the report which informed Members of the projected 2024-25 outturn position for the Directorate of Education, based on the most recent information available. The report identified projected under / (overspends) currently forecast for 2024-25 (full details in Appendix 1).

Members were advised that, in summary the current projected outturn position for Education is an overspend of £1.435m, an increase of £0.389m from the update at the end of period 7. It is important to note that this financial projection excludes a forecast outturn position for our schools. Information with regards to the school's financial position was included in the body of the report. The report also provided an update with regards to progress against the Directorates savings target of £1.319m for the year (excludes schools).

A Member queried whether the grant for vulnerable learners was sufficient to cover the costs. Members were advised that this included the additional support budget and the out of county placement budget, and current underspends would be affected by the end of the financial year. The Member also sought clarification on funds available for Home to School transport overspends. Members were advised of the projected overspends in this area and also informed that Home to School transport provision was currently under review with Mobilising Team Caerphilly. The Member also queried the overspends on professional statementing and referred to the use of in-house psychologists. Members were advised that the overspend was

related to the statementing team, and that the educational psychologist budget was separate.

A Member sought clarification on the funding for the Multiply Project and queried the effectiveness of the programme in Caerphilly, and the number of adults that had taken up the offer of education. Members were advised that this data would be circulated to members following the meeting. A Member also queried why the advertising was ongoing when the project was due to end. Members were advised that the opportunities for adult education would still continue, and funding had also recently been agreed for multiply for another year, now ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026.

A Member also queried the number of schools that had deficit budgets, and what was being done by the Local Authority to mitigate the impact on schools and the wellbeing of staff. Members were advised that the authority had 85 schools, and there would be different reasons for each of the schools that were in deficit, with some being due to a decrease in pupil numbers. Additional funding was due to be received from Welsh Government in the current financial year. Members were also advised that HR were currently supporting 8 schools in Caerphilly who were reducing staff numbers for next year. The Member also queried the funding regarding ALN allocation, and members were advised that schools had been notified of the details of this funding from Welsh Government, and that consultation was ongoing for further funding from Welsh Government.

A Member sought clarification on the underspend in the budget for educational psychologists and queried whether this was due to current vacancies in this area. Members were advised that this was due to the demand for this profession which resulted in staff movement, and there were currently approximately 9 to 10 full time employees. Members were also referred to the school-based counselling service which was available.

A Member queried whether the Multiply Project could continue with the use of reserves. Members were advised that the allocation to the Multiply Project had ended in March 2025, and that this programme would still continue for a transition year for the next 12 months. Members were also advised that a bid was ongoing to fund a similar programme going forward.

Members noted the content of the report.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 6.32 pm.

Approved as a correct record, subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2025.

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CHAIR