



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

DECISION MADE BY: Cabinet DATE DECISION MADE: 18 December, 2023

Cabinet Members Present:

Councillor A Morgan (Chair), Councillor M Webber (Deputy Chair),
Councillor G Caple, Councillor A Crimmings, Councillor R Lewis,
Councillor C Leyshon, Councillor M Norris and Councillor B Harris

Other Councillor(s) in Attendance:-

Councillor D Grehan
Councillor K Morgan
Councillor A Owain Rogers

Agenda Item : 3

**SUBJECT: Proposal to close Rhigos Primary School with pupils transferring to
Hirwaun Primary School**

1. DECISION MADE:

Agreed –

1. To note the content of the report;
2. To note the information contained within the attached Consultation Report, attached as Appendix A to this Cabinet Report, which includes a summary of correspondence received during the consultation, including the full response from Estyn, feedback received from the online survey, and notes of the meetings held;
3. To note the feedback from Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee which met on 14th December 2023 provided by the Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication; and
4. To progress the proposals to the next stage of the consultation process by issuing an appropriate Statutory Notice which will trigger the start of the Objection Period.

With the agreement of the Leader, the following Non-Committee Members were granted permission to address the Cabinet:

- County Borough Councillor A Rogers
- County Borough Councillor K Morgan

With the agreement of the Leader, the following member of the public was granted permission to address the Cabinet:

- Ms M Evans – Chair of Governors

N.B – Attached to the Decision Notice is a letter from the Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication on behalf of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee who met on 14th December 2023 to undertake pre-scrutiny the Cabinet report.

2. REASON FOR THE DECISION BEING MADE:

The need to advise Members of the outcome of the recent consultation in respect of the proposal to close Rhigos Primary School with pupils transferring to Hirwaun Primary School by no later than September 2024.

3. LINKS TO CORPORATE PRIORITIES/FUTURE GENERATIONS - SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:

The proposal would lead to a more efficient use of RCTCBC's education estate supporting RCTCBC's Think Climate, Making RCT Carbon Neutral by 2030, for the years 2022 to 2025. The closure of an energy inefficient school would contribute towards achieving the overarching objective of RCTCBC's carbon reduction targets to become carbon neutral by 2030. It also aligns with the WG's ambition of a carbon neutral public service by 2030 and the wider goal of a net zero carbon Wales by 2050 as set out in the WG's Net Zero Carbon Strategic Plan: 2022. The investment at Hirwaun Primary School has seen a number of sustainable technologies incorporated

into the design including a rainwater harvesting system, photo-voltaic panels, electric vehicle charging facilities and biodiversity areas on the school site.

Due regard has been made to all seven wellbeing goals and the five ways of working, as contained within the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which requires RCTCBC to think about the long-term impact of decisions on communities to prevent consistent issues such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

The proposal could contribute towards achieving some of the seven wellbeing goals

- **A Healthier Wales** – Accommodation at Hirwaun Primary School consists of enhanced outdoor spaces and sports facilities. As well as supporting the full range of curriculum activities these facilities are also available for community use.
- **A More Equal Wales** – The wider catchment area for Hirwaun Primary School and the way the school is used would bring neutral or positive socio-economic impacts to all of the vulnerable groups over an extended geographical area.
- **A Wales of More Cohesive Communities** – Hirwaun Primary School is a fully accessible and integrated community school with a dedicated area designed within so that the local community can safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day.
- **A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language** – Although Hirwaun Primary School is English medium, Welsh is taught as part of the curriculum and all pupils would benefit from having the opportunity to be taught in brand new facilities fit for the 21st century (as is currently the case there is also the option to attend Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Penderyn and engage the support of the Welsh language Immersion Team to support transition, subject to parent/carer choice).
- **A Globally Responsive Wales** – The new school at Hirwaun has been built to BREEAM excellent standards and the school can use sustainability features of the building, e.g., photo-voltaic panels, rainwater harvesting and biodiversity, to further develop extra-curricular activities which encourage healthy lifestyles for the school and wider community.

The proposal could contribute towards achieving some of the five ways of working by:

- **Long Term** – The proposal forms a part of RCTCBC's wider 21st Century School Organisation Strategy and supports the better strategic management of RCTCBC's education estate.
- **Prevention** – RCTCBC believes that the proposal represents the best opportunity to safeguard and sustain educational standards for the future and provides a platform for further improvement.
- **Integrations** – Hirwaun Primary School is a fully accessible and integrated community school. A dedicated area is provided within the school so that the local community and parents/carers can safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day.
- **Collaboration** – RCTCBC would continue to work effectively with internal and external partners to ensure the changes brought about by these

proposals would meet the short and long term needs of pupils, parents/carers, staff and the wider community.

- **Involvement** –The proposal is made in accordance with the School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011 / 2018) and seeks the views of a prescribed list of stakeholders including pupils, parents/carers, staff and the wider community. As such face to face meetings were held with Governing Bodies, staff and School Councils of both Rhigos Primary School and Hirwaun Primary School.

4. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO DECISION BEING MADE:

The consultation processes in respect of the proposal have been undertaken under the arrangements outlined in the WG's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011 / 2018). These arrangements stipulate that a Consultation Report must be prepared prior to the publication of any Statutory Notice which will progress the proposal. It further states that Statutory Notices be published within 26 weeks of the end of the consultation should a decision be made to progress with the statutory process.

Further detail in respect of the consultation can be found at section 7 of the report.

5. PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY A COMMITTEE OF THE COUNCIL:

[Cabinet – 18th December 2023](#)

[Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee - 14th December 2023](#)

6. PERSONAL INTERESTS DECLARED:

County Borough Councillor A Rogers declared the following personal interest in respect of the item: "I am a Governor of Rhigos Primary School"

7. DISPENSATION TO SPEAK (AS GRANTED BY STANDARDS COMMITTEE):

N/A

8. (a) IS THE DECISION SUBJECT TO CALL-IN BY THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:

Yes

Note: This decision will not come into force and may not be implemented until the expiry of 3 clear working days after its publication to enable it to be the subject to the Call-In Procedure in Rule 17.1 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

The closing date for Call-In is 5pm on the 21 December 2023

8.(b) IF NO, REASONS WHY IN THE OPINION OF THE DECISION-MAKER THE DECISION IS EXEMPT OR NON APPLICABLE:

- I. COUNCIL / SCRUTINY FUNCTION (CALL IN IS THEREFORE NON APPLICABLE):-

Reason: N/A

II. URGENT DECISION:-
Reason N/A

8.(c) IF DEEMED URGENT - SIGNATURE OF PRESIDING OFFICER OR DEPUTY PRESIDING OFFICER OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE CONFIRMING AGREEMENT THAT THE PROPOSED DECISION IS REASONABLE IN ALL THE CIRCUMSTANCES FOR IT BEING TREATED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULE 17.2:

.....
(PRESIDING OFFICER)

.....
(Dated)

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PUBLICATION

Publication on the Council's Website:- **Monday, 18 December 2023**

APPROVED FOR PUBLICATION: ✓

15th December 2023

Re: Pre-Scrutiny of a draft cabinet report: 'Proposals to close Rhigos Primary School with pupils transferring to Hirwaun Primary School'

Dear Cabinet Members,

I have been instructed by this Council's Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Committee to convey the comments and observations of Members in relation to the **Proposals to close Rhigos Primary School with pupils transferring to Hirwaun Primary School** before its consideration at the Cabinet meeting on 18th December 2023

The Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Committee gave feedback and comments in respect of the proposal at its meeting on the 14th December 2023. Members undertook a constructive discussion in respect of the recommendations from the Director of Education & Inclusion. In advance of scrutinising the content of the draft Cabinet report, Committee received representations from the two local members, Councillor Karen Morgan and Councillor Adam Rogers. The Chair also facilitated the opportunity for a member of the public to make representation upon this proposal.

Members can view the full discussion and debate of the Education & Inclusion Scrutiny, in respect of this item of business [here](#)

In summary, the following points were raised:

- Members raised a number of concerns regarding home to school transport arrangements and potential additional costs the Council would incur, should these proposals be adopted. In particular, a number of members felt that the draft Cabinet report was lacking information with regards to these additional costs.
- A number of members sought reassurance that should Cabinet support the recommendations of the report, that 'age-appropriate travel' would be a priority particularly for younger pupils as they felt parents would be compelled to drive their children to school if this was not a consideration. In respect of this point members noted the potential additional carbon footprint created by the proposals. A number of members referenced a need for Cabinet to consider these proposals in the wider context of Climate Change, and the need to encourage residents to utilise active travel more in the future.
- A Member noted that with the yet unknown numbers of pupils qualifying and using home to school transport, the cost savings made may be minimal versus the costs of transporting pupils to schools using a more pollutive mode of transport.
- Cabinet were asked to consider the recommendations of the Director, in the context of the Future Generations & Well-being Act.

- A Member sought clarification on how the proposal will align with RCTCBC's educational goals and strategies but was pleased to hear that as a school reorganisation proposal, it would ensure that RCT has sustainable schools for the future and align with the Local Authority's five strategic priorities and maintain high quality standards.
- All members were sympathetic to the concerns of parents, but a number of members also acknowledged that allowing the number of surplus places to remain high would have a detrimental impact on the future financial viability of Rhigos Primary School and impact children's education in the future. A number of members cited these reasons, as important in Cabinet's deliberations.
- A member queried whether or not a business case could be made or had been considered for investment in the repair and maintenance of the current school. A number of members acknowledged the recent investment in a new school for Hirwaun and the capacity available at this school. Many members referenced the improvement facilities and learning environment provided by a modern school.
- A number of Members sought reassurance that these concerns are mitigated, where possible, and should Cabinet be minded to progress with this proposal, the authority look to put in place sufficient support for pupils and parents during transition. In addition, that the school buildings, where appropriate, are used for community benefit. The example of after schools clubs or extra circular activities was referenced.
- A Member raised concern regarding the high volume of objections to the proposal particularly from the residents of Hirwaun and sought clarity on what improvements can be put in place to the access and egress to Hirwaun Primary School to ensure that it can safely accommodate further pupils who may travel by bus or by car. The Member also explored the importance of equity of access to provisions such as after school clubs and parents' evenings for those who can't access transport or where public transport may not be reliable (aligning with the anti-poverty agenda which is a priority of the Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Committee).
- A Member referred to Estyn's report (which they considered an important factor) and sought assurance that the standards of teaching in Hirwaun Primary School will be as good as that in Rhigos Primary School.

At the conclusion of the Committee's discussions in respect of the proposal, Members recognised the challenges that the proposal would present for individuals and the community should they be adopted by Cabinet and wished for their comments to be considered and conveyed.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christian Hanagan", written over a faint circular stamp or watermark.

Christian Hanagan
Service Director Democratic Services and Communication