



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2023-24

EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14TH DECEMBER 2023

PRE-SCRUTINY OF A DRAFT CABINET REPORT: 'PROPOSALS TO CLOSE RHIGOS PRIMARY SCHOOL WITH PUPILS TRANSFERRING TO HIRWAUN PRIMARY SCHOOL'

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATIONS.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide the opportunity for Committee to pre-scrutinise the recommendations of the Director of Education & Inclusion to the Council's Cabinet on the 18th December 2023, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation & Welsh Language in respect of the 'PROPOSAL TO CLOSE RHIGOS PRIMARY SCHOOL WITH PUPILSTRANSFERRING TO HIRWAUN PRIMARY SCHOOL'.
- 1.2 This report provides a mechanism for Committee to comment on the proposals and to authorise the Service Director Democratic Services & Communications, to present the comments and/or recommendations of Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Committee:

- 2.1 Scrutinise and challenge the 'draft' Cabinet report and recommendations of the Director of Education & Inclusion, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation & Welsh Language.
- 2.2 Following Members' consideration of the draft Cabinet report, authorise the Service Director Democratic Services & Communications to facilitate and provide Committee's comments, observations and/or recommendations to the Cabinet in respect of the proposals prior to Cabinet's consideration on the 18th December 2023.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To provide Scrutiny with the opportunity to undertake pre-scrutiny of the proposal to transfer pupils from Rhigos Primary School to Hirwaun Primary School following its closure, in line with the requirements of the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018) prior to its consideration by Cabinet.
- 3.2 The need to provide Members with information on the outcome of the recent consultation in respect of the proposals, in order to make informed comments and provide feedback to Cabinet.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1. At the meeting of Cabinet held on 18th September 2023, approval was given to begin the relevant and required statutory school organisation consultation to close Rhigos Primary School in line with the requirements of the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018); and to extend the catchment area of Hirwaun Primary School to incorporate the current catchment area of Rhigos Primary School.
- 4.2 Members are aware of the Council's statutory duty to maintain the efficiency and effectiveness of provision to ensure that all schools are well placed to deliver high quality education that meets the needs of the community and makes best use of public funding. In its report to Cabinet in September 2023, it was proposed that due to the steady decline of pupils joining Rhigos Primary School and with pupil numbers forecast to continue to fall in the next five years, that Rhigos Primary School closes with pupils from the school moving to Hirwaun Primary School. The consultation also stipulated that 'in accordance with the School Admissions Code (005/2013) this proposal will be subject to parental choice'.
- 4.3 Members will note that the report also referenced that Rhigos Primary School is also within the catchment of the Welsh medium provision at Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Penderyn, and tailored and individual support is currently available from the Council's Welsh language Immersion Team for any pupils wishing to continue their education, at YGG Penderyn, through the medium of Welsh.
- 4.4 The consultation in respect of these proposals was undertaken between 2nd October 2023 and the 17th November 2023 under the arrangements outlined in the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code. These arrangements stipulated that 'the consultation must be undertaken when the proposals are at a formative stage and that Consultation Documents must be prepared and circulated to prescribed consultees, as well as being published on the Council website.'
- 4.5 Attached at Appendix 1A, is the draft Cabinet Report, including recommendations from the Director of Education & Inclusion, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation & Welsh Language.

- 4.6 The feedback from a wide range of stakeholders provided via the consultation process has been incorporated into a Consultation Report (and subsequent appendices) which is attached at part of the draft Cabinet report included at Appendix A. The draft Cabinet report provides 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.

5 PRE-SCRUTINY

- 5.1 Members are reminded that the purpose of pre scrutiny activity is to influence and scrutinise decisions of Cabinet before they are made, as ‘critical friends’.
- 5.2 This draft Cabinet report was identified for pre-scrutiny by the Chair of the Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Committee, Cllr Sera Evans. This request is in accordance with the Council’s Overview & Scrutiny Procedure Rules.
- 5.3 This opportunity has been facilitated for Committee, with the support of the Director of Education & Inclusion, and the Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation & Welsh Language.
- 5.4 In the absence of the opportunity for Overview & Scrutiny Committee to determine the most appropriate mechanism for scrutinising this matter, the Service Director Democratic Services & Communications, has facilitated this report in consultation with the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. This approach will be reported for information, when the Overview & Scrutiny Committee next consider the Cabinet Work programme.
- 5.5 The Education and Inclusion Services Scrutiny Committee continues to have the opportunity to explore and comment on a number of reports in advance of Cabinet’s consideration to bring a different perspective to the decisions made and enabling Cabinet decisions to be more informed.

6 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS/SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (with Social-Economic Duty) was prepared in respect of the proposal and was published on RCTCBC’s website together with a Consultation Document that outlined the proposal in further detail in accordance with the requirements of the WG’s School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011 / 2018).

7 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 A Welsh Language Impact Assessment was prepared in respect of the proposal and was published on RCTCBC’s website together with a Consultation Document that outlined the proposal in further detail in accordance with the requirements of the WG’s School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011 / 2018).

8 CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT

8.1 The aforementioned proposals have been subject to a comprehensive public consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including Estyn's full response and the clarification to the response, for a minimum period of six weeks.

8.2 The involvement of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee and public participation in the pre-scrutiny exercise will contribute to the quality and robustness of Cabinet decision-making.

9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

10 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

10.1 The following legislation / regulations are aligned to this report: The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the WG's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011 / 2018).

11 LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.

11.1 There are links between RCTCBC's Directorate of Education and Inclusion Service's School Modernisation Programme and RCTCBC's Corporate Plan for the years 2020 to 2024, 'Making a Difference', as well as to the Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services' Strategic Plan for the years between 2022 and 2025 (as set out in the attached draft Cabinet report).

11.2 The proposal could contribute to the some of the seven well-being goals within the Future Generation (Wales) Act 2015 and due regard has been made to the Five Ways of Working, as contained within the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

12 CONCLUSION

12.1 As the attached report sets out, 'the Council has a statutory duty through its approach to the organisation and leadership arrangements of schools to maintain the efficiency and effectiveness of provision to ensure that all schools are well placed to deliver high quality education that meets the needs of the community and makes best use of public funding'.

12.2 The undertaking of pre-scrutiny by the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee in respect of the outcome of the recent consultation, will ensure that the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee fully evaluates the recommendations of the draft Cabinet report, prior to consideration by Cabinet.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

as amended by

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS:

EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSALS TO CLOSE RHIGOS PRIMARY
SCHOOL WITH PUPILS TRANSFERRING TO HIRWAUN PRIMARY SCHOOL**

14TH DECEMBER 2023

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES &
COMMUNICATIONS**