



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

29TH APRIL 2024

**PROPOSAL TO CLOSE RHIGOS PRIMARY SCHOOL WITH PUPILS
TRANSFERRING TO HIRWAUN PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES IN
DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION, YOUTH
PARTICIPATION AND WELSH LANGUAGE (COUNCILLOR R LEWIS)**

AUTHOR(S):

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the outcome of the recent publication of a Statutory Notice in respect of the proposal to:

Close Rhigos Primary School with pupils transferring to Hirwaun Primary School by no later than September 2024.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Members:

2.1.1 Note the content of this report.

2.1.2 Note the information contained within the Objection Report, attached as Appendix A to this Cabinet Report, which includes a summary of correspondence received.

2.1.3 Agree to implement the proposal with no amendments.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 To progress the proposal in accordance with the process outlined in the Welsh Government's (WG's) School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011 / 2018).

3.2 RCTCBC has a statutory duty, through its approach to the organisation and leadership arrangements of schools, to maintain the efficiency and effectiveness of provision. Implementing the proposal is in accordance with this statutory responsibility.

4. **BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 Members will recall that, at the meeting of the Cabinet held on [18th September 2023](#), approval was given to begin a statutory process to formally consult on the proposal to close Rhigos Primary School with pupils transferring to Hirwaun Primary School by no later than September 2024.
- 4.2 On [14th December 2023](#), the matter was pre-scrutinised by the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee who provided a [formal response](#).
- 4.3 Following the conclusion of the consultation period, and at a subsequent meeting of the Cabinet held on the [18th December 2023](#), a decision was taken to progress to the next phase of the statutory process and to publish the required Statutory Notice.
- 4.4 On [11th January 2024](#), the matter was subject to a 'call in' by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for further scrutiny and a decision was reached by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee not to refer the proposal back to the Cabinet.
- 4.5 The Statutory Notice was published on the 26th January 2024 which triggered the commencement of the objection period. This ran until the 23rd February 2024. During the objection period, a total of 1,440 objections were received by the closing date of the 23rd February 2024. These are broken down below:
- 54 written objections.
 - Two petitions signed by 951 and 65 respondents, respectively.
 - 1,384 respondents individually signed pre-written objections co-ordinated by the 'Save Rhigos Primary School' action committee.
- 4.6 To note, 55 of the responses received during the consultation period which ran between 2nd October 2023 and 17th November 2023, were requested to be treated as objections and so these have also been included in the total below.

| Number of Objections Received | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| Period | Number |
| Objection Period | 1,440 |
| Consultation Period | 55 |
| Total | 1,495 |

- 4.7 In accordance with the WG's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011 2018), the Objection Report, attached at Appendix A, summarises the objections, along with RCTCBC's response to them.
- 4.8 To confirm, **all** of the objections received during the Objection Period and the preceding Consultation Period have been reviewed by RCTCBC's Cabinet Members.

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared in respect of the proposal and published on Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's (RCTCBC's) website together with the 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). The Equality Impact Assessment was updated following a review of the responses received.

5.2 The outcome of Equality Impact Assessment identified:

- Positive and neutral impacts, and no negative impacts, upon the protected characteristics.
- Hirwaun Primary School is fully compliant with the Equality Act 2010 thereby ensuring that no pupil, staff member, parent / carer or member of the wider community is prevented from fully accessing the whole extent of the facilities.
- There would be positive impacts on the Welsh language as, despite Hirwaun Primary School being an English medium primary school, it provides improved facilities to assist with the delivery of Welsh as a key element of the curriculum. This is in line with the WG's Cymraeg 2050 and RCTCBC's WESP, as we aim for the teaching of Welsh as a second language in English medium schools to be of the highest quality.
- Hirwaun Primary School has first class facilities that ensure all families who wish to access places at the school can be accommodated. The excellent facilities on offer may encourage more parents / carers to choose their catchment school, including the families of learners with additional learning needs (ALN). The capacity at Hirwaun Primary School may also assist armed forces personnel and carers who may move to the area mid-academic year.

5.3 It was considered that no negative impacts were identified within the Equality Impact Assessment which would prevent approval to be sought to continue to implement the proposal. To confirm, the Action Plan included within the Equality Impact Assessment will continue to be reviewed throughout the duration of the proposal's delivery period.

6. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 A Welsh Language Impact Assessment has been prepared in respect of the proposal and published on RCTCBC's website together with the 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). The Welsh Language Impact Assessment was updated following a review of the responses received.

6.2 The outcome of the Welsh Language Impact Assessment identified:

- Hirwaun Primary School has recently benefitted from a £9.6 million investment via the WG's Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, delivering a brand new school with a high quality, 21st century teaching and learning environment, enriching the teaching and learning experiences for both pupils and staff. The school opened its doors to the English medium pupils previously attending Penderyn Community Primary School in September 2021. It is a fully accessible school building which wholly complies with the Equality Act 2010.
- Rhigos Primary school is also within the catchment of the Welsh medium provision at Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Penderyn, and tailored and individual support would be available from RCTCBC's Welsh Language Immersion Team for any pupils wishing to continue their education at Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Penderyn through the medium of Welsh. To note, the Immersion Team are already supporting a number of pupils at Penderyn that have made the decision to move from English medium education to Welsh medium.
- Although Hirwaun Primary School is an English medium primary school, 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.
- RCTCBC aims to embed positive habits and attitudes towards the Welsh language through purposeful planning to promote the informal use of the Welsh language amongst pupils inside and outside schools. Facilitating the use of the Welsh language across the curriculum and in wider contexts in schools, to ensure a continuum of linguistic progression to support pupils in the transition between key stages, offers all pupils the opportunity to become fully bilingual and aligns with the Curriculum for Wales 2022. Pupils attending Hirwaun Primary School would continue to be encouraged and supported to do this through the achievement of the 'Cymraeg Campus' Welsh Language Charter, a framework to promote and increase the use of Welsh.
- Hirwaun Primary School is a fully accessible and fully integrated community school. A dedicated area has been designed within so that the local community are allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day. The headteacher of the Hirwaun Primary School will continue to be encouraged and supported to consider using these facilities to increase participation in the Welsh language by offering parents / carers and other members of the community the opportunity to attend Welsh medium learning classes for adults and/or other opportunities for community engagement through the medium of Welsh.
- This could contribute towards the WG's Cymraeg 2050 and RCTCBC's WESP.

6.3 It was considered that no negative impacts were identified within the Welsh Language Impact Assessment which would prevent approval to be sought to continue to implement the proposal. To confirm, the Action Plan included within

the Welsh Language Impact Assessment will continue to be reviewed throughout the duration of the proposal's delivery period.

7. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 7.1 The consultation process in respect of the proposal has been undertaken under the arrangements outlined in the WG's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011 / 2018).
- 7.2 The consultation for the proposal took place between the 2nd October 2023 and the 17th November 2023. Following the conclusion of the consultation period, and at a meeting of the Cabinet held on the [18th December 2023](#), a decision was taken to progress to the next phase of the statutory process and to publish the required Statutory Notice. The Statutory Notice was published on the 26th January 2024 which triggered the commencement of the Objection Period. This ran until the 23rd February 2024.
- 7.3 A total of 1,495 objections were received. Information contained within the Objection Report, attached as Appendix A to this Cabinet Report, includes a summary of correspondence received.
- 7.4 On [14th December 2023](#), the matter was pre-scrutinised by the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee

8. THE STATUTORY PROCESS

- 8.1 The Statutory Notice for the proposal refers to the:
- Closure of Rhigos Primary School with pupils transferring to Hirwaun Primary School by no later than September 2024.
- 8.2 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).

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There will be no capital funding implications should the proposal go ahead. Revenue savings accrued from the closure of Rhigos Primary School would be reinvested into supporting pupils' education in the County Borough of Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 9.2 Given the 2.8 mile distance between Rhigos Primary School and Hirwaun Primary School, all pupils residing in the Rhigos Primary School catchment area would qualify for home to school transport to Hirwaun Primary School, in line with the statutory provision as identified within Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008. Additional revenue implications resulting as a consequence of the closure of Rhigos Primary School, including the increase in home to school transport

costs, would be identified as the proposal is developed and incorporated into RCTCBC's Medium Term Financial Planning arrangements.

The recent review of the Council's Home to School Transport policy does not impact the transport arrangements highlighted above in paragraph 9.2.

- 9.3 Financial projections show that progressing with the proposal would have a positive impact upon the budgetary position of Hirwaun Primary School. Further information on the current and projected budgetary positions of both schools affected by the proposals were included in the Consultation Document presented to Cabinet on [18th September 2023](#).

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 10.1 Powers for Councils to develop school organisation proposals are governed by:

- The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013.
- The WG's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011 / 2018).

- 10.2 Councils must, when exercising functions under Part 3 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, act in accordance with any relevant requirements contained in the WG's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011 / 2018) and must have regard to any relevant guidelines contained in it.

11. LINKS TO RCTCBC'S CORPORATE PLAN, NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE FUTURE GENERATIONS (WALES) ACT 2015

- 11.1 There are links between RCTCBC's Corporate Plan for the years 2020 to 2024, 'Making a Difference', specifically:

- **People:**
 - Encouraging all residents to lead active and healthy lifestyles and maintain their mental wellbeing:
 - Delivering new indoor and outdoor sporting facilities available for community use and enhancing existing sporting facilities such as changing rooms and outdoor play areas.
 - Improving services for children and young people and ensuring the needs of children are considered in everything we do:
 - Improving the social, emotional, and mental health and wellbeing of children and young people by increasing the range of specialist services available on our school sites for use by the wider community.
- **Places:**
 - Ensuring Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) is one of the safest places in Wales, with high levels of community cohesion where residents feel safe:
 - Supporting the voluntary, community and faith sectors to help build active and cohesive communities, creating safe and accessible spaces for meeting the needs of residents within their communities.

- **Prosperity:**
 - Ensuring we have good schools, so all children have access to a great education.
- 11.2 The proposal also supports the core aims of RCTCBC's new Corporate Plan for the years 2024 to 2030, 'Working with our Communities', and the four Well-being Objectives, which are:
- **People and Communities** – Supporting and empowering RCT residents and communities to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives.
 - **Work and Business** – Helping to strengthen and grow RCT's economy.
 - **Nature and the Environment** – A green and clean RCT that improves and protects RCT's environment and nature.
 - **Culture, Heritage and Welsh Language** – Recognising and celebrating RCT's past, present and future.
- 11.3 There are links to RCTCBC's Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services' Strategic Plan for the years between 2022 and 2025, specifically:
- **Strategic Priority 3:**
 - Ensuring equity and support for vulnerable pupils and their families.
 - **Strategic Priority 5:**
 - Delivering 21st century learning environments and innovative services for our pupils and communities.
- 11.4 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. 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.
- 11.5 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.
- 11.6 The proposal could contribute towards achieving some of the seven wellbeing goals by:
- **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 for pupils to attend Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Penderyn and engage the support of RCTCBC's 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., rainwater harvesting system, photo-voltaic panels, electric vehicle charging facilities and biodiversity areas, to further develop extra-curricular activities which encourage healthy lifestyles for the school and wider community.

11.7 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 Modernisation Programme 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 the proposal 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 WG's 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.

11.8 As stated in paragraph 5.1, an Equality Impact Assessment which further details the contribution of the proposal to the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 has been prepared.

12. STRATEGIC OR RELEVANT TO ELECTORAL WARDS

12.1 The proposal to close Rhigos Primary School with pupils transferring to Hirwaun Primary School (subject to parent / carer choice) is relevant to the specific wards covered by these catchment areas.

13. CONCLUSION

13.1 RCTCBC 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.

13.2 Rhigos Primary School is RCTCBC's smallest school and the number of pupils joining Rhigos Primary School has been in steady decline, with pupil numbers forecast to continue to fall in the next five years. To note, since the commencement of the consultation period in relation to the proposal, the number of statutory school aged pupils at Rhigos Primary School has reduced from 51 to 46.

13.3 Allowing surplus places to remain high through inaction would directly and negatively affect the future financial viability of Rhigos Primary School and impact children's education in the future. Rhigos Primary School's budget, with a diminishing income, would have less money for staff salaries, curriculum activities, equipment, running costs and maintenance of the school estate and would struggle to maintain their current good education offer.

13.4 The proposal seeks to provide the opportunity for more pupils to benefit from the significant investment delivered via the WG's Sustainable Communities for Learning programme in the Cynon Valley. Consultation outcomes suggest that there is strong opposition to the proposal, however, the rationale for change highlights many potential benefits.

13.5 Estyn have confirmed that the proposal is likely to, at least, maintain the standard of education provision and outcomes for pupils in the area. The response further states that the:

'Local Authority has set out a clear rationale for its proposal. It outlines strongly the many advantages of closing Rhigos Primary School, with all pupils transferring to Hirwaun Primary school'.

13.6 It is recommended therefore, that Members consider the contents of the attached Objection Report, and formally approve the proposal as consulted upon, with no amendments, allowing it to progress.

Other Information:

Relevant Scrutiny Committee:

Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee.

Contact Officer(s):

Andrea Richards, Service Director for 21st Century Schools and Transformation.

Lisa Howell, 21st Century Schools Business and School Organisation Manager.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

29TH APRIL 2024

**ITEM: PROPOSAL TO CLOSE RHIGOS PRIMARY SCHOOL WITH PUPILS
TRANSFERRING TO HIRWAUN PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Background Papers:

Appendix A – Objection Report.