



SPECIAL EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 20TH MARCH 2024

**SUBJECT: POST 16, SINGLE SEX AND SURPLUS PLACES BOARD –
FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND
CORPORATE SERVICES**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek the views of the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee on two linked proposals to Cabinet that have been made by the Post 16, Single Sex and Surplus Places Board.
- 1.2 The proposals seek Cabinet agreement to undertake a formal consultation on the provision of Single Sex Education at Lewis School Pengam and Lewis Girls School as well as a proposal to address some long-standing issues of Surplus Places across Secondary School provision in the Upper Rhymney Valley area.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Post 16, Single Sex Surplus Places Board was set up in 2019 to develop recommendations for change that would be considered by Caerphilly's Cabinet.
- 2.2 The Board is made up of a wide range of stakeholders including Head Teachers, College Representatives, Scrutiny Members, Governor Representatives, TU Representatives, EAS representatives and Local Education Authority Officers.
- 2.3 The Board's initial work focused on the development of a set of proposals for a sustainable approach to 6th form provision across the whole of the County Borough.
- 2.4 The Upper Rhymney Valley (URV) Sixth Form Partnership and the Caerphilly Sixth Form Partnership were subsequently formed with schools working together to ensure as broad a curriculum could be offered to learners as sustainably as possible.
- 2.5 The Board has recently been reconvened to conclude its work by developing recommendations to Cabinet in respect of single sex provision across the Lewis Schools and reducing the level of surplus places, specifically across Secondary Schools within the Upper Rhymney Valley.

- 2.6 The Board met on the 31st January 2024 and the 6th February 2024. Members considered a presentation that built on the previously established informal consensus on Single Sex provision and addressing surplus places, as well as providing additional information that the Local Authority had been tasked with establishing to aid decision-making.
- 2.7 At its meeting of the 6th February, the Board voted unanimously in support of the proposals set out in 5.7(1), 5.7(2) and 5.18(1) of this report and asked that they be progressed through Scrutiny and onwards to Cabinet in accordance with the identified timeline.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1.1 That the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee:
- 1) Note the unanimous support from the Post 16, Single Sex and Surplus Places Board (the Board) on the proposals set out in within 5.7(1), 5.7(2) and 5.18(1) of this report
 - 2) Comment on and scrutinise the content of this report and the stated proposals ahead of their consideration at Cabinet

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To establish the views of the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee on the proposals set out in 5.7(1), 5.7(2) and 5.18(1) ahead of their onward consideration by Cabinet on the 3rd April 2024.

5. THE REPORT

Single Sex Education

- 5.1 Through previous discussions in 2021, the Post 16, Single Sex and Surplus Places Board had reached an informal consensus that co-education would be the way forward in the Upper Rhymney Valley (URV).
- 5.2 Having gained Board consensus at that time, Local Education Authority (LEA) officers engaged directly with the four URV Secondary Head Teachers as educational experts to consider this position further.
- 5.3 The URV Head Teachers agreed the following wording to reflect their position on Single Sex provision as well as the potential benefit of moving toward co-education across the Lewis Schools:
- “We explore ways in which families can be brought together and re-united and avoid the division that some experience when, due to the current arrangement of schools, children from the same family are split apart at age 11”.
- 5.4 At the Board Meeting of the 30th January 2024, Board Members received a presentation from the Corporate Director Education and Corporate Services.

5.5 The presentation:

- confirmed the previous position of the Board and the Upper Rhymney Valley Secondary Head Teachers on a move away from single sex provision;
- recognised the fact that the schools share the same catchment areas;
- highlighted the significant levels of surplus places at both Lewis Schools (circa 40% at each);
- highlighted the fact that these were the last two local authority-maintained schools providing single sex education in Wales

5.6 Having received the presentation, the Board were keen to afford time to both new and returning members to reflect on the information that had been provided and to raise any further questions prior to considering the proposal more formally. On this basis, the Board agreed to reconvene prior to the February half term to determine the single sex proposal.

5.7 This subsequent meeting took place on the 6th February 2024. At this meeting the Board once again received the presentation from the Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services. Having done so and following a number of questions being dealt with by Officers, the Board resolved unanimously to support the following linked proposal, and for its onward consideration at Scrutiny and Cabinet:

The Council should formally consult stakeholders with a view to:

- (1) moving from Single Sex provision to co-education in the Upper Rhymney Valley
- (2) locating Lewis catchment pupils at the Lewis School Pengam site, while retaining the Lewis Girls School site to manage the transition over a number of years (minimising impact on exam pupils and enabling staff and pupils to be integrated over an appropriate timeframe)

5.8 Subject to Cabinet approval, this proposal will proceed to consultation in late early June 2024 and will follow the processes as outlined in the School Organisation Code 2018.

Surplus Places (Upper Rhymney Valley)

5.9 The Board had previously found informal consensus that on the basis of surplus places and demographics, the Council should consider moving from four secondary schools to three in the Upper Rhymney Valley (URV). However, at that stage, the Board did not make any suggestions in terms of that configuration.

5.10 Council officers once again engaged directly with the four URV Head Teachers as educational experts to consider this position further.

5.11 The Head Teachers agreed the following wording in respect of the surplus places position in the Upper Rhymney Valley:

“When considering current and projected demographics and the variable quality of the secondary school buildings it would seem appropriate to reduce the number of secondary schools in the URV from four to three and consider the possibility of a new build in this revised configuration.”

5.12 Recognising the building condition at Lewis School Pengam combined with the building condition and recent investment at Idris Davies 3-18 School, the URV Heads asked that the Council:

“Commission survey works to identify the possibilities / constraints of a new build school being at Lewis Girls or Heolddu.”

5.13 During the intervening period, the Council has commissioned a range of external consultants to undertake detailed survey and initial design works at both the Lewis Girls School and Heolddu Comprehensive School both sites. The survey works undertaken by external consultants were as follows:

- BB98 building size & site constraints
- Intrusive Site Investigation Works
- Ecological Surveys
- Tree Surveys
- GPR Survey
- Topographical Survey

5.14 In addition to the physical survey works, work was also undertaken to gain further understanding into the following matters at each of the two potential sites:

- Historic ground investigation information
- Coal mining legacy information and existing Coal Mining Risk Assessments
- Space requirements for School build, site levels and topography
- Ancillary considerations such as existing Leisure and Sports facilities
- Number of playing fields required to serve increased pupil numbers
- Additional parking requirements for the extra teachers, etc.
- Impact of any development on highway safety and site access issues
- Potential impact of any Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation
- Impact of any Flood Zones on build

5.15 Survey Summary Findings – Lewis Girls School

5.15.1 The land available at the Lewis Girls site is at least 20% too small to accommodate a new co-ed school with this percentage likely to increase further as flood data was further analysed.

5.15.2 Due to the existing constraints of the site, the sports pitches for the new school would need to be located off site (with the nearest potential location at Ystrad Mynach park).

5.15.3 There are a number of service constraints and Flood zones that impact the sites' use with regard Welsh Governments Technical Advice Note (TAN) 15.

5.15.4 Concerns over 'highway' access were also identified given the existing challenges at the site and the adverse impact that a significant increase in pupil numbers would bring.

5.15.5 An additional challenge would exist were a new school to be built at the Lewis Girls site, in that pupils would need to be accommodated elsewhere while the school was being built and then moved back once the new school was open.

5.16 Survey Summary Outcomes – Heolddu

5.16.1 The Heolddu site would be sufficient to accommodate a new school with improved external leisure facilities including a new 3G pitch.

5.16.2 The survey works that had been undertaken had not identified any challenges in respect of a build at the proposed location.

5.16.3 As the new school would potentially be built across the road from the current location, pupils would be able to continue to attend the existing Heolddu Comprehensive building for the duration of the build and would not need to be transferred elsewhere.

5.17 Having received the presentation and the survey information set out above, the Board again recognised the importance of affording time to both new and returning members to reflect on the information provided and to raise any further questions prior to formal consideration of the surplus places proposal.

5.18 The surplus places proposal was then considered at the meeting of the Board of the 6th February 2024. At this meeting the Board once again received the presentation from the Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services. Having done so and following a number of questions being dealt with by Officers, the Board resolved unanimously to support the following linked proposal, and for its onward consideration at Scrutiny, Cabinet and Welsh Government:

The Council should formally consult stakeholders with a view to:

- (1) developing a new secondary school on the site adjacent to the existing Heolddu School and consider upgrading the existing Leisure Facilities to serve the school and the surrounding community

5.19 In order to progress this proposal, as well as seeking Cabinet approval to consult, additional reports to Cabinet will be required along with the approval of a Full Business Case by Welsh Government as well as any relevant planning and drainage approvals.

5.20 **Conclusion**

5.21 Having previously recommended to Cabinet some proposals on ensuring a sustainable future for Post 16 provision in Caerphilly, the Post 16, Single Sex and Surplus Places Board has turned its attention to the remaining matters of Single Sex and Surplus Places.

5.22 Having reached an informal consensus on both issues previously, following some detailed survey works, the Board has now reached a position where it has formally and unanimously supported a number of proposals to Cabinet for consideration with the views of the Scrutiny Committee also being sought.

6. **ASSUMPTIONS**

6.1 None.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 Not required at this stage in the process. A full Integrated Impact Assessment will be completed at the relevant stage in the process.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 None at this stage. The report seeks to establish the views of the Scrutiny Committee and then Cabinet to move to formal consultation and it will not be until the consultation has concluded that a decision on next steps, and therefore costs, can be made.
- 8.2 There will be further reports to Scrutiny and Cabinet as next steps are determined and any further proposals are developed.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 This will be dependent on specific proposals that will be taken forward albeit the Trade Unions have been briefed and will continue to be briefed as the consultations progress.

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 The Head Teachers of Lewis Girls School and Lewis School Pengam updated staff groups on the morning of the 4th March 2024.
- 10.2 Technical briefings were then scheduled with the following stakeholders on the 4th March 2024:
- Cluster Head Teachers of Heolddu, Idris Davies, Lewis Girls and Lewis School Pengam
 - Chairs and Vice Chairs of the 4 URV schools
 - Heolddu Ward Members
 - Idris Davies Ward Members
 - Lewis Girls School Ward Members
 - Lewis School Pengam Ward Members
 - Opposition Group Leaders
 - JCC Members
 - Affected MSs
 - Affected MPs
- 10.3 This report has also been shared with the consultees set out below and the views of those consultees have been captured within the body of this report.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 School Organisation Code 2018 (Welsh Government)
School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013

Author: Richard Edmunds, Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services

Consultees: Dave Street, Deputy Chief Executive
Mark S Williams, Corporate Director for Economy and Environment
Gareth Jenkins, Interim Corporate Director Social Services
Councillor Carol Andrews, Cabinet Member for Education and Communities
Sue Richards, Head of Education Planning and Strategy and Place Shaping Programme Director
Andrea West, Place Shaping and Sustainable Communities for Learning Service Manager
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