



CABINET - 3RD APRIL 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 Cabinet approval on two linked proposals 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 2024, 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.
- 2.8 The “Post 16, Single Sex and Surplus Places Board – Further Recommendations to Cabinet” report was considered by a special meeting of the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday 20th March 2024 as outlined in 10.1.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Cabinet Members are asked to:

- 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) Approve the recommendations to proceed to consultation as outlined in the report.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To update Cabinet on the recommendations from the Post 16, Single Sex and Surplus Places Board (the Board) on the proposals set out in 5.7(1), 5.7(2) and 5.18(1).
- 4.2 To gain Cabinet approval to progress to formal consultation in line with the statutory process prescribed by the School Organisation Code 2018.

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 and 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 having already been 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 approval from 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 "Post 16, Single Sex and Surplus Places Board – Further Recommendations to Cabinet" report was considered by a special meeting of the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday 20th March 2024.

One Member asked if consultation would extend to parents and pupils yet to attend Lewis School Pengam and Lewis Girls School, but who planned to do so for secondary education. The Place Shaping and Sustainable Communities for Learning Service Manager advised that the year 5 and 6 parents and pupils attending feeder schools within the catchment area would be consulted if the recommendations were accepted. The Member enquired about staff implications if the proposal on single sex provision went ahead. The Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services outlined that HR consultations would take place if the proposal should progress, but at this stage support was being sought purely on going out for initial consultation on the recommendations. The Member asked if the proposal was motivated by a drop in birth rates. The Chief Education Officer advised that the main driving force was quality of education and the well-being of pupils and she highlighted that currently pupils are separated at the age of eleven from friends and family. Members heard about surplus places at both Lewis schools which was linked to the recommendations under discussion. The meeting was advised that surplus places were currently circa 40% at both schools.

A Member asked about future transportation costs for pupils if the recommendations were accepted. The Head of Education Planning and Strategy and Place Shaping Programme Director highlighted to Members that both schools shared the same

catchment area and that whilst a significant increase in transportation costs was not anticipated, that level of detail had not been assessed at this stage of the proposal.

The Headteacher of Lewis School Pengam (Mr Chris Parry) outlined to Members the process which had been followed to reach the current stage. The four headteachers of the secondary schools in the Upper Rhymney Valley had been part of discussions for four years.

The Chair raised the transition period designed to minimise impact on exam pupils and allow staff/pupil integration and asked how long this period was likely to be in place. The Headteacher of Lewis School Pengam outlined the level of collaboration between both schools which was already taking place at sixth-form level. Members heard how an appraisal on the length of time needed for transition would emerge after continuing discussions between the two schools. This was likely to be a number of years in the first instance. The Chief Education Officer also stressed the importance of staff well-being as part of any future consultation. The Chair asked about the future of the Lewis Girls School site if the plans to locate Lewis catchment pupils at the Lewis School Pengam site went ahead. The Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services advised that there were a number of options and highlighted the significance of community consultation on any future plans. The meeting heard about health facility challenges in Ystrad Mynach.

One Member asked about the continuous professional development and training for staff if they moved from single sex provision to co-education. The Chief Education Officer provided assurances that this would be a priority should the proposal progress. The Headteacher of Lewis School Pengam advised that the majority of staff had backgrounds in co-education schools.

A Member enquired about the provision for ALN pupils in plans for a new secondary school at Heolddu. The Head of Education Planning and Strategy and Place Shaping Programme Director provided assurances that ALN provision would be a key part of any future plans and highlighted that a full business case would have to be provided in order to obtain Welsh Government funding at the relevant time.

The Chair asked if any modification was needed at Lewis School Pengam if it moved from single sex provision to co-education. The Headteacher of Lewis School Pengam highlighted that there was sufficient capacity, the building was in good condition as it had only been built in 2004 and that co-education toilet facilities were already in place. Therefore, minimal modification would be required if the recommendations were accepted.

11. STATUTORY POWER

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

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Background Papers:
None