

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD AT BY TEAMS ON FRIDAY, 11 MARCH 2022

PRESENT

County Councillor M R Harris (Chair)

County Councillors MC Alexander, B Baynham, P Davies, A W Davies, H Hulme and R Powell

In attendance: County Councillors A Jenner, I McIntosh, L Rijnenberg and R Williams

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

2. MINUTES

The Leader was authorised to sign the minutes of the meetings held on 22nd February and 1st March 2022 as correct records.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported.

4. MOUNT STREET INFANT SCHOOL, MOUNT STREET JUNIOR SCHOOL AND CRADOC CP SCHOOL

Cabinet considered objections received during the statutory objection period to the proposals to:

Phase 1

From 31 August 2023:

To discontinue the following three schools which are maintained by Powys County Council:

- Mount Street C.P. Infants School, Rhosferig Road, Brecon, Powys, LD3 7NG (“Mount Street Infants School”);
- Mount Street C.P. Junior School, Brecon, Powys, LD3 7LU (“Mount Street Junior School”);
- Cradoc Community Primary School, Cradoc, Brecon, Powys, LD3 9LR (“Cradoc C.P. School”).

From 1 September 2023:

To establish a new English-medium community school maintained by Powys County Council for boys and girls aged 4-11 years old (“the New School”), that will operate on the current sites of Mount Street Infants School, Mount Street Junior School and Cradoc C.P. School.

Phase 2

From 2025/2026:

The Council proposes to make a regulated alteration to transfer the New School to a new building on the former Brecon High School site, Penlan, Brecon, Powys, LD3 9SR.

During the statutory notice period 113 objections had been received. A summary of the objections received were included in an appendix to the report along with the Council's response to the issues raised in the objections.

Having considered the objections received, it was recommended that the Council proceeds with implementation of the proposals in respect of Mount Street Infants School, Mount Street Junior School and Cradoc C.P. School, as outlined in the Statutory Notice for the reasons outlined in the report.

County Councillor Liz Rijnenberg spoke as the local member for Mount Street Infants and Mount Street Junior Schools. She argued that things had changed significantly since the plans had first been put forward and that with labour shortages and increasing costs the Council should concentrate on delivering the school transformation projects already committed to. She said that feeling in the community was that the consultation process had been inadequate and that suggestions from governors, staff and the wider community had not been taken on board. She argued that the long transition period would lead to unacceptable disruption to pupils and staff at a time when stability was needed. She said that there was no evidence that learning outcomes would be improved and that it made no sense to amalgamate the schools for limited cost savings. She reported that concerns had been expressed about the siting of the new school on the periphery of the town would lead to increased distance to travel, increase use of cars, loss of green space and impact on the economy of town. She urged the Cabinet to vote against the proposal.

County Councillor Roger Williams spoke as governor of Mount Street Juniors and as a Councillor for part of the Cradoc C.P. School catchment area. He argued that emphasis of the transformation programme should have been on the secondary rather than the primary sector and he asked the Cabinet to reflect on the recent vote in Council. He asked the Cabinet to withdraw the closure notice for Cradoc. He spoke about the exceptional quality of teaching at Mount Street Juniors and the need for a new school.

County Councillor Iain McIntosh spoke as the local member for Cradoc CP School. He argued that the proposal was in breach of the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code by seeking to merge a rural school with two urban schools. He questioned whether the school's capacity was 175 pupils and said that by his calculations it could only hold 143 pupils. He further argued that the proposals had not been correctly scrutinised and he questioned why the Chair of the Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee had not declared a party whip or predetermination. He noted that the number of pupils had increased to 104. He challenged the idea that small schools would struggle to deliver the new curriculum whilst Welsh Government had said it had been designed for and with

the assistance of small schools. He urged the Cabinet not to proceed with the proposal.

Officers addressed the points made by the local members. In respect of the phasing of the proposal, it was confirmed that phase one was in respect of leadership of the head teacher and governing body with children continuing to attend their existing school site. The second phase would see the construction of a new school on the Penlan site which would represent an investment of £10 million to £15 million.

Officers confirmed that consultation had been carried out in accordance with the school organisation code with everyone having the opportunity to put forward their views. Cabinet was reminded of the most recent Estyn inspection which had endorsed the Council's school transformation strategy. The requirements of the School Organisation Code had been met at every stage and the suggestion that officers had misled anyone was refuted. In respect of the capacity of Cradoc CP School site, the figure of 175 had been agreed by the head teacher in September 2019.

The Head of Transformation and Communications then addressed each of the factors of the School Organisation Code and having done so recommended proceeding with the proposals for the following reasons:

- To offer enhanced opportunities for pupils from attending one new, larger, school.
- To enable staff expertise and good practice to be shared across the entire primary age range.
- To ensure that all staff at the three current schools have the opportunity to secure positions in the new school.
- To provide more flexibility and personal development opportunities for staff.
- To provide improved transition arrangements for pupils currently attending Mount Street Infants School and Mount Street Junior School between the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2.
- To provide access to 21st Century Schools Funding in order to provide a new building.
- To reduce the Council's surplus places in primary schools.
- To rationalise the primary school estate.
- To realise a financial saving.
- Meets all the Critical Success Factors.

The Director of Education addressed the points raised by local members about the new curriculum and transition. She accepted the importance of continuity and she noted the provision of nurture that would be available. On the new curriculum, there would be support from the local authority for all schools to help deliver it, but it would add significantly to the workload for head teachers particularly in small schools.

On pupil numbers at Cradoc CP School, Cabinet was advised that there were 93 pupils in classes from Reception to Year 6. It was these classes which were funded by the delegated budget that were used to calculate pupil numbers. It was acknowledged that some concerns expressed in the consultation about the

new school, it was hoped that these could be addressed in the design phase. The Monitoring Officer advised that issue raised by Councillor McIntosh about potential predetermination by some members of the Scrutiny Committee was a Code of Conduct issue that was not a matter for Cabinet.

The Leader and Portfolio Holder thanked the local members for their contributions. The schools were thanked the warm welcome they had given to the Cabinet on their visit. The Leader also noted that the Cabinet had received and read a large amount of correspondence.

Having considered the objections and the comments made at the meeting it was

RESOLVED

- 1. To receive the Objection Report in respect of the proposals for Mount Street Infants School, Mount Street Junior School and Cradoc C.P. School.**
- 2. To approve the following proposals in respect of Mount Street Infants School, Mount Street Junior School and Cradoc C.P. School:**

Phase 1

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Phase 2

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The Council proposes to make a regulated alteration to transfer the New School to a new building on the former Brecon High School site, Penlan, Brecon, Powys, LD3 9SR.’

3. In accordance with the Scheme for Financing Schools, to introduce the following restrictions on Mount Street Infants School, Mount Street Junior School and Cradoc C.P. School:

- Spend at the three schools is restricted to that included in its approved budget plan and no virement of funds between budget headings is permitted unless approved by the Authority;
- Any staffing changes are subject to approval by the Authority;
- Any contracts awarded for the supply of goods or services are subject to approval by the Authority.

4. To proceed with implementation of Phase 1 of the proposals by establishing a temporary governing body to work with the Council to establish the new school.

5. To prepare for implementation of Phase 2 by commissioning feasibility works on the Penlan site and developing a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) for consideration by Cabinet.

The Portfolio Holder for Education and Property thanked Cabinet colleagues for their support and the Schools Transformation team for all of their work. He also thanked the Leader for the opportunity she had given him to serve in her Cabinet.

5. WCCIS REPLACEMENT PROPOSAL

Cabinet considered a proposal to replace the WCCIS system used by Social Care and which despite recent systems and server upgrades continued to have significant and ongoing challenges.

The preferred option was to develop a new system which would require the purchase cost of a new system developed estimated at £1.17million, and associated implementation revenue costs of £1.2million. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that the main contract was with Bridgend County Borough Council but that Powys County Council could terminate the contract through fault.

Cabinet had received the comments of the Health and Care Scrutiny Committee and the Chair of the Committee, County Councillor Amanda Jenner, expanded on them at the meeting.

RESOLVED

- 1. To note the requirement for a replacement social care system.**
- 2. To approve the re-focus of digital transformation for Social Care to align resource to ensure the most effective procurement of a replacement system for WCCIS.**

3. To approve the provision of capital expenditure of £1.2m in 2023/24 from the digital transformation provision, subject to further investigation.

6.	VISION 2025 TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME 2017-2022 - ADMINISTRATION: PROGRAMME AND SELF-EVALUATION REPORT
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Cabinet noted the key achievements for the Vision 2025 Transformation Programme, which included:

- Mid Wales Growth Deal - securing a deal with a ground-breaking partnership bringing a combined investment of £110m from UK and Welsh Government. This is expected to lever in additional investment from other public and private sources.
- A new strategy developed and implemented for Transforming Education in the county. Since it was approved, the council has established all age schools, introduced a new structure to oversee post-16 schools' provision, approved the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and established a satellite provision in the middle of the county so that learners with additional learning needs are as near to home as possible.
- 118 new affordable homes in the county (79 of these currently under construction). An additional 109 houses awaiting appropriate consent.
- Building work underway for two new Extra Care sites to provide additional housing for older people. A proposal for a third site being prepared for planning, with other locations also being identified.
- A Strategic Outline Case prepared for the North Powys Wellbeing Project in readiness for Welsh Government approval.
- Over 100 processes redesigned and launched on the website, enabling easier customer interaction and 24/7 accessibility.
- Improvements to business planning and budgeting processes.

The Leader thanked her Cabinet colleagues and officers who had helped to achieve so much during the five year term of the Administration.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted.

7.	FORECAST OUTTURN UPDATE FOR REVENUE AND CAPITAL
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Financial Forecast for the year ended 31st March 2022 (as at 28th February 2022)

Cabinet considered the financial forecast for the year ended 31st March 2022 as at 28th February 2022. The forecast was projected at an overall surplus of £6.85 million including the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and delegated schools. The surplus excluding delegated schools and the HRA was projected to be £3.79 million.

The report set out details of grants received from Welsh Government since December 2021 to support council services. Most of this funding had to be utilised to deliver services in the current financial year, whilst some could be carried forward and utilised in 2022/23.

RESOLVED

1. To note the current budget position and the projected full year forecast to the end of March 2022.
2. To note the grants set out in section 3 and Appendix A of the report.
3. That the Chief Executive (in consultation with the Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer)) be given delegated authority to approve any virements or adjustments up to £500k during the pre-election period. Any such virements or year-end amendments will be retrospectively reported to Cabinet in June.

Capital Forecast as at 28th February 2022

Cabinet noted that the Capital programme at the 28th February 2022 was budgeted at £96.03 million following the successful award of additional grants and the reprofiling of budgets between financial years. Actual spend amounted to £51.50 million, representing 54% of the total budget.

The report set out details of capital grants received from Welsh Government and requests for two virements:

- An additional £200,000 from the unallocated budget of the Council's 21st Century Schools Capital Programme to fund additional highways works at Welshpool Church in Wales School due to asbestos remedial investigations, additional drainage issues, FAWL system, fencing not in original schedule and additional surveying work.
- An allocation of £0.10 million in the capital programme to help defend the council against cyber-attacks and enhance cyber security.

RESOLVED

1. To note the contents of the report.
2. That Cabinet approves the virements proposed in section 4.

8.	GLOBAL CENTRE OF RAIL EXCELLENCE
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This report was withdrawn.

9.	LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS
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The Leader reported that she had received an email from County Councillor Stephen Hayes highlighting the plight of Ukrainian refugees trying to get to the UK and asking her to make representations to the Home Office to make the process easier for them. She advised that following the meeting of Council she

had drafted a letter to be sent to the Government and that she would amend it to incorporate the points made by Councillor Hayes.

The Leader also reported the disappointing news that the Welsh Government had decided to withdraw top-up grants for Community broadband schemes. Officers would be contacting communities to see what could be done to mitigate this. She advised that consideration would be given to making a bid to the Mid Wales Growth Deal.

The Leader closed the meeting by thanking her Cabinet colleagues, the Chief Executive and the Executive Management Team, the Senior Leadership Team and all the officers for their assistance. The Deputy Leader paid tribute to the Leader for leaving the Council in a much stronger position than when she came to office.

County Councillor Rosemarie Harris
Chair