

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held in the Committee Room and virtually on Zoom on 21 May, 2025

PRESENT: Councillor Jeff Evans (Chair)
Councillor Sonia Williams (Vice-Chair)

Councillors Geraint Bebb, John Ifan Jones, Aled M. Jones, R. Llewelyn Jones, Jackie Lewis, Llio A. Owen, Keith Roberts.

Co-Opted Members : Mrs Wenda Owen (The Church in Wales)
Mr John Tierney (The Catholic Church).

Local Members: Councillors Trefor Lloyd Hughes, MBE, Pip O'Neill

Portfolio Members

Councillors Gary Pritchard (Leader and Portfolio Member for Economic Development), Neville Evans (Portfolio Member for Leisure, Tourism and Maritime), Alun Roberts (Portfolio Member for Adults' Services and Community Safety), Dafydd Roberts (Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language), Nicola Roberts (Portfolio Member for Planning, Public Protection and Climate Change), Robin Williams (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Member for Finance and Housing).

IN ATTENDANCE: Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer
Director of Education, Skills and Young People
Head of Democracy (DS)
Corporate Planning, Performance and Programme Manager (GP)
Scrutiny Officer (EA)
Committee Officer (ATH)
Webcasting Officer (FT)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Ieuan Williams, Alwen Watkin, Arfon Wyn, Glyn Haynes (Local Member), Councillor Dyfed Wyn Jones (Portfolio Member for Children, Young People and Families)

ALSO PRESENT: Mr Fôn Roberts, Director of Social Services

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillors Jeff Evans and Keith Roberts both declared a personal interest only with regard to item 3 on the agenda as members of the Governing Body of Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi.

Councillors Pip O'Neill and Trefor Lloyd Hughes, MBE (not members of the committee) also declared a personal interest with regard to item 3 on the agenda as members of the Governing Body of Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi and Football Association of Wales respectively.

2 ENGAGEMENT REPORT – PROVISION OF POST-16 EDUCATION

The report of the Director of Education, Skills and Young People on the outcome of the public engagement on the future of post-16 education provision on Anglesey was presented for the committee's consideration and review.

Councillor Dafydd Roberts, Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language presented the report explaining that the Council decided to undertake a public engagement exercise on the post-16 education provision for Anglesey conducted between 20 January and 7 March 2025. Rather than a formal consultation, the engagement was chosen because no specific proposal was being put forward and because the Council wanted to involve a wider range of stakeholders and foster a broader conversation to understand different perspectives and opinions. Stakeholders were invited to provide feedback on several options as noted in the report and had the opportunity to propose alternative options. In addition to the engagement survey, face to face sessions were held at the Coleg Menai campus in Llangefni and across the five secondary schools. The public engagement yielded a significant response as detailed in the engagement report.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People confirmed that the report is a key component of the Council's commitment to reviewing post-16 education provision, as outlined in the Council's Sustainable Communities for Learning Strategic Outline Programme and its Modernising Learning Communities and Developing the Welsh Language Strategy. Both documents emphasise the necessity of reassessing the current post-16 education provision model to ensure it is sustainable, efficient and responsive to learners' experiences. The report also highlights current challenges within the sector including class sizes, demographic changes and financial viability. A majority of respondents (54%) in the engagement exercise expressed support for a review of post-16 education provision, with the preferred option being Option 2 – to further develop a closer working relationship between the existing providers. Respondents identified several priorities for the future of post-16 provision including local accessibility, the quality of teaching and the availability of subject choices locally. Considering the feedback from the public engagement, the committee is recommended to support Option 2 as the most appropriate way forward and authorise officers to prepare a strategic plan to this end. The plan will also aim to address or mitigate current challenges in post-16 education provision on Anglesey while strengthening post-16 learner entitlement and experience. This vision aligns with the broader ambition of ensuring the highest possible quality of education on the Island for current and future generations.

In reviewing the engagement report the committee discussed the following matters –

- Members sought clarification on what a closer working relationship between existing providers would entail, the benefits of this approach and whether it would result in additional costs.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People explained that the Council is looking forward to working with schools, the college, parents and learners to develop a framework for closer co-operation. A variety of ideas emerged from the public engagement and the Council is committed to bringing the stakeholders together to create a strategic plan to address these challenges over time. In response to further questions about improving subject accessibility and choice at each institution while minimising the need for learners to travel between sites, the Director of Education and Skills acknowledged that there is work to be done to enhance learners' experiences. The Council remains dedicated to working alongside stakeholders to achieve these improvements.

- Members enquired about the potential challenges and risks of not implementing the proposal and whether the Council has a contingency plan in place.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People advised that failing to address the identified challenges now would make it significantly more difficult to revisit them in future. The engagement exercise has created an expectation among stakeholders that the matter will be resolved. The Chief Executive emphasised that the engagement process has provided the Council with a clear direction. In line with the report's recommendation, the strategic plan will explore all available options and provide the necessary details. Before any formal consultation can take place, the necessary impact assessments must be conducted. Subject to the Executive's approval a rigorous process will need to be followed before any of the aims and objectives can begin to be realised.

- While the committee acknowledged the engagement exercise as comprehensive, particularly praising the strong response from learners, assurance was sought that it had successfully reached learners of different ages, abilities and academic interests.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People confirmed that the engagement sessions held through the schools and college had included learners from various year groups with additional opportunity for participation through the engagement survey. The Deputy Chief Executive emphasised that the Council highly values the perspectives of children and young people. One of the themes emerging from the engagement exercise was the need to place greater emphasis on young people's views. If the recommendation is approved, the Council will have time to further develop this approach, potentially by establishing focus groups and seeking the input of learners who have completed their post-16 education.

- Questions were raised about how the changes align with and contribute to achieving the objectives of the Council Plan.

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that the engagement exercise, report and potential outcomes for post-16 education provision are closely linked to several key objectives of the Council Plan. One such objective is to increase the opportunities to learn and speak the Welsh language – an objective that runs through the engagement like a gold thread. Another key objective is the delivery of effective education provision for current and future generations which the engagement exercise and resulting work aim to achieve within the post-16 sector.

- Members enquired about the prominence given to the Welsh language in the public engagement exercise.

The Head of Democracy confirmed that a Welsh Language Impact Assessment had been conducted regarding the proposal to further develop a closer working relationship between the existing post-16 education providers. The Welsh Language Commissioner had enquired about the scope of the assessment, in response it was clarified that the exercise undertaken was a public engagement rather than a formal consultation. If future steps require a formal consultation, an additional impact assessment will be carried out.

A member raised concerns regarding the relationship between schools and the PGCE course at Bangor University, noting that he was aware of a school reluctant to offer placements to graduates seeking teaching experience as part of their training and entry into the profession. The Deputy Chief Executive responded that he would follow up on the specific matter with the member and emphasised that the Island's schools maintain a strong relationship with the University. He referenced the CaBan partnership established several years ago between the university, schools and the regional education consortium which introduced a programme designating certain schools as leading schools/hubs for teacher training, including schools on Anglesey.

A member also expressed concern that no members of the public were present at the meeting, given the significance of the subject matter. He enquired whether the committee's meetings receive sufficient publicity.

The Head of Democracy advised that engagement with the public has been a key part of the scrutiny review. While steps have been taken to enhance public involvement, further work is needed and will be undertaken during this financial year. The committee will receive an update in due course.

Having reviewed the Post-16 Education Provision Engagement Report and received assurances regarding the matters raised, the Corporate Scrutiny Committee resolved to recommend the following for approval by the Executive –

- **To further develop a closer working relationship between the existing providers, and,**
- **That Officers be authorised to prepare a strategic plan for further developing a closer working relationship between the existing post -16 providers which will attempt to address or mitigate the challenges currently facing post-16 education provision on Anglesey and strengthen post-16 learner entitlement and experience.**

3 MODERNISING LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND DEVELOPING THE WELSH LANGUAGE STRATEGY – POTENTIAL NEW SCHOOL BUILDING IN THE HOLYHEAD AREA

The report of the Director of Education, Skills and Young People which sought the committee's views on the proposal to relocate Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi learners to a new school building for 11-18 year old learners and conduct a statutory consultation was presented for consideration.

Councillor Dafydd Roberts, Portfolio Member for Education, Skills and Young People presented the report and the proposal as an exciting prospect for both Holyhead and the Island. He highlighted the condition of the Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi building which although operational, requires major repairs or replacement in the short to medium term. The presence of RAAC in much of the school buildings means the situation needs to be addressed in the short term. While remedial work has been carried out to make the school safe, a long-term solution is essential. The proposal paper sets out the outcome of work to explore a range of potential future options for Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi and has been drafted in accordance with the expectations of the revised School Organisation Code (011/2018). Given that the requirements on schools have evolved significantly in recent years the proposal to relocate Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi to a new school building is considered the most effective solution to address the challenges facing the school. The committee is therefore asked to support the proposal and the commencement of a statutory consultation on the matter.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People provided an overview of the proposal paper affirming that it complies with the revised School Organisation Code and aligns with the Council's commitment to improving schools and creating modern learning environments that support communities and the Welsh language. The proposal involves relocating Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi learners to a new school specifically designed for the 11- 18 age range with capacity for 900 pupils. In developing the proposal the Council considered a number of factors as outlined in the paper with the primary driver being the condition of the current school building - classified as Grade C (operational but in need of major repair or replacement in the short to medium term). The current and projected future maintenance costs for the existing school building amount to nearly £29m. While a range of alternative options for the future of Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi were considered, as detailed in section 6

of the report, relocating the school's learners to a new purpose built school for 11-18 year olds is the preferred option. The cost implications are set out in section 7 of the report.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People described the proposal as an opportunity to establish a modern, fit -for-purpose school while addressing the challenges facing Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi, particularly the RAAC issue. Additionally the proposal has the potential to generate long-term savings in repair and maintenance costs over the next 25 years. It also aligns with the objectives of the Strategic Outline Plan. Under the revised School Organisation Code, relocating a school to a site more than a mile away from the current site is considered a regulated alteration. This requires a statutory process to gather and consider the views of learners and stakeholders before a final decision is made. The committee is asked to support the proposed course of action.

The committee welcomed the proposed new building for Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi as an exciting development and in its subsequent discussion on the proposal paper it raised the following matters for further clarification –

- Members sought assurance that the proposal paper fully complies with the revised School Organisation Code (011/208).

The Corporate Planning, Performance and Programme Manager confirmed that the proposal paper has been drafted in accordance with the Code's requirements which clearly set out Welsh Government's expectations regarding the contents and he expressed confidence in its compliance. Additionally, the proposal paper has undergone review by external legal advisors whose input is reflected in the final document.

- Members enquired about the potential challenges and risks of not implementing the proposal and whether Officers are satisfied that it meets the current and future needs of secondary education in the Holyhead area. Hopes were expressed that the scheme if approved, might be completed before 2030.

The Council Leader acknowledged that one of the main challenges has been completing the documentation in line with the revised School Organisation Code and Welsh Government requirements. He emphasised the importance of establishing a high quality secondary school for Holyhead and assured the committee that based on the available information including demographics and primary school pupil enrolment data, the Executive is confident that the proposal meets both the current and future secondary education needs of Holyhead. He also affirmed that the work underpinning the proposal is robust.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the preparatory work had been thorough. He noted that while the Council Leader had discussed the possibility of shortening the process with the Minister for Education, this was not feasible. He assured the committee that the Council is proceeding as swiftly as possible within the guidelines - not only to expedite the process but also to minimise the risk of the school deteriorating further, despite the significant work undertaken to make the school safe.

- Members sought assurance on the proposal's affordability and the availability of a contingency budget if the process exceeds the projected five years. They also questioned land acquisition and the Council's confidence in securing the identified site.

The Chief Executive confirmed ongoing discussions to acquire the land, noting that several sites were considered with the challenge of meeting the space required for a new secondary school (19 acres approximately). He clarified that the £65.9m cost of the proposal excludes land procurement.

The Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer advised that cost estimates align with Welsh Government guidelines and figures and include reserve funds. The costs depend on whether the scheme follows the capital funding route or the Mutual Investment Model (MIM) where private partners build and maintain public assets and the Welsh Government pays a fee covering construction, maintenance and financing costs. At the end of the contract the asset transfers to public ownership. Under MIM, the Council would pay the private partner a fixed fee for use of the school over 25 years, thereby shifting the cost risks to the private partner. Regarding affordability, the Section 151 Officer acknowledged the proposal represents a major investment. Both funding routes incur additional costs – around £1m annually for MIM and a similar amount for loan repayment under capital funding. The difference lies in the repayment periods: 25 years for the MIM contract and 60 years for capital borrowing. If the Council should decide to maintain the status quo, refurbishing the existing Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi building would require an investment of around £30m, borrowed over a shorter 20 year term because of the building's age, costing between £1.4m to £2.3m per annum. A new school however would lower maintenance costs and could potentially attract pupils who might otherwise choose to attend schools on the mainland. This would lead to a better funding settlement for the Council which would help contribute to the additional costs. The Section 151 Officer further confirmed that the Welsh Government funding contribution excludes land acquisition costs for new schools.

- Members raised concerns about the potential impact of such a large site on other provision which might need to be funded in future on another site.

The Chief executive clarified that the land requirement aligns with guidance for the planned school size. While opportunities to integrate may be possible further assessment is required to determine feasibility, benefits and costs which are likely to add to the overall expense. The proposal does not entail any reduction in service level or provision.

- Members asked whether redevelopment costs for the existing school site had been considered and if it could be used for social housing.

The committee was informed that the site is valued at approximately £700k which would contribute towards the cost of building the new school. Under Council protocol, decommissioned school buildings are transferred to the Property Department and initially offered to other Council departments. The Housing Service would assess its suitability for social housing based on local need for a site of that size. If no department expresses an interest, the site would be marketed. The Chief Executive noted that if the statutory consultation process leads to a new school, the five year timeline allows the site's future to be evaluated as part of formulating the new local development plan, assessing the housing needs in Holyhead and the classification of the site over the next thirty years.

- Members sought assurance that the proposal will help the Council fulfil the Modernising Learning Communities and Developing the Welsh Language Strategy.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People explained that section 4 of the proposal paper outlines how the proposal addresses various strategic aspects. Implementing the proposal would support the ongoing improvement trend against outcomes 3 to 7 of the Council's Welsh In Education Strategic Plan. Responding to further questions on capacity he expressed confidence that based on the demographic trend analysis undertaken, the planned school size can meet demand even if more than the current 57.5% of catchment area pupils wish to attend.

- Members queried whether the proposed new secondary school would have an impact on other secondary schools.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People clarified that the proposal involves relocating the existing Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi to a new building rather than establishing a new school. While parents can express a preference for their child's school, admission depends on each school's admission number and criteria.

- Members also enquired about the proposed school site's impact on transportation.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People explained that travel arrangements are covered in section 4.12 of the proposal paper. If the proposal is accepted, active travel plans will be reviewed and prepared in line with the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 once the new site is determined.

- Local Members raised concerns regarding the future of the Millbank playing fields should Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi relocate to a new site. They also enquired whether part of the current school site could be designated to improve parking at Ysgol Cybi.

The Chief Executive explained that he understood that the Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi site includes both the land on which the school building is situated and the playing field and that the latter is protected by a covenant requiring a separate legal process and justification for any changes. If the proposal is implemented, the playing field's long-term sustainability will need to be addressed, either with the Council's involvement or through a community interest group or independent social enterprise. He emphasised that no decisions have been made regarding the future use of the current school site and playing field. The proposal focuses solely on the intent to relocate Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi to a new building on another site, with any plans for the existing site subject to a separate decision-making process and land use considerations.

The Chair concluded the discussion by emphasising that the education and wellbeing of children and young people is of paramount importance. He also highlighted the importance of the Council seeking the views and opinions of parents, pupils and schools and working collaboratively with them to achieve a successful outcome.

Following detailed review of the proposal paper and comprehensive discussion, and having accepted the assurances provided on the matters raised, the Corporate Scrutiny Committee resolved to recommend the proposal paper and the following proposal to the Executive for approval –

- To “Relocate Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi learners to a new school building for 11-18 year old learners”, and
- Authorise Officers to undertake the necessary statutory consultation.

Councillor Jeff Evans
Chair