

Committee: **Cabinet**

Date of meeting: **23rd February 2026**

Report Subject: **Outturn Report on the Proposal to Increase Pen y Cwm Capacity**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Sue Edmunds – Cabinet Member Children, Young People & Families**

Report Submitted by: **Joanne Watts – Head of Resources & Planning, Education**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
						23.2.26		

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a detailed overview of the responses received from the statutory consultation undertaken by Education. For the proposal to extend the capacity of Pen y Cwm Special School. The report provides an overview of the consultation:

- methodology.
- process; and,
- outcome responses including key themes emerging from the responses received

1.2 A determination is sought from Cabinet in line with the proposal to proceed to Statutory Notice.

2. Scope and Background

Consultation Process and Methodology

The Welsh Government School Organisation Code – second edition (2018), dictates that proposals **must** be published for the following elements of school reorganisation:

1. the opening of a maintained school (including a special school).
2. the closing of a maintained school (including a special school).
3. to make a regulated alteration to a maintained school; and,
4. to change the category of a maintained school.

2.1.1 Therefore, the proposal to increase capacity at Pen y Cwm must be subject to a formal consultation as the Council is proposing to increase pupil capacity by over 10% - from 175 to 205 in September 2026 and further again 2029/30 to 250 pupils and this is classed as a regulated alteration.

2.1.2 The consultation was initiated and conducted via a formal consultation document and accompanying online survey (please refer to **Appendix 1** for the consultation document), which was fully compliant with the statutory requirements set out within the aforementioned Code. The purpose of consultation was to establish the views and opinions of consultees in

relation to the proposal, in order to inform the Council's political decision-making process.

2.1.3 In accordance with the Welsh Government School Organisation Code, the Authority is required to publish a consultation report (at least 2 weeks prior to the publication of statutory notice) which:

- summarises the issues raised by consultees.
- responds to these by means of clarification, amendment to the proposal or rejection of the concerns, with supporting reasons.
- sets out Estyn's response to the consultation in full; and,
- responds to Estyn's response by means of clarification, amendment to the proposal or rejection of the concerns, with supporting reasons.

2.1.4 Formal consultation commenced on Monday 8th December 2025, upon publication of the formal consultation document on the Council's website. The process then concluded on Sunday 18th January 2026 at midnight. Consultees were asked to provide their views, opinions and feedback via one or more of the following methods:

- attending a pre-arranged virtual or face to face session.
- completion of an on-line survey; and/or,
- in writing via the 21st Century Schools email address.

2.1.5 The Council targeted consultees as directed by the Welsh Government School Organisation Code (please refer to **Appendix 2** for a comprehensive list of consultees who were provided with the necessary documentation). Electronic letters were distributed to:

- all Blaenau Gwent schools to staff, parents and pupils.
- all Governing Bodies via the Education Achievement Service; and,
- other consultees as detailed within **Appendix 2**

2.1.6 Information regarding the consultation was shared with:

- 985 approx. Teaching Staff & Non-Teaching Staff (including all staff at Pen y Cwm Special School)
- 9,395 Parents of learners
- 24 Schools
- 24 Governing bodies
- 55 via wider community

In total, 128 formal responses were received via email or survey and one comment via the social media post.

3.0 Findings

3.1 Overview

3.1.1 Public Engagement Overview

The Resources and Planning team engaged with Trade Unions and held a drop-in session at Ebbw Vale LAC on Wednesday, 10 December 2025, for parents, staff, and the wider community. Eleven school staff attended.

The consultation document stated that individuals or groups wishing to discuss the proposal with officers could arrange a session or request a telephone call. In this instance, the Headteacher of Pen y Cwm requested

that two additional dedicated sessions be held with parents and learners. These sessions took place at the school on Wednesday, 14 January 2026. In total, four parents, who were also Governors, and four learners attended and shared their views on the school's needs and required facilities.

In summary, Education held four sessions with key consultees, 19 consultees participated (see Appendix 3 for further details). A range of questions were raised and responded to during the meetings. Additional queries and views were submitted via the online survey or by email. Please note that Appendix 4 summarises the learners' responses regarding their requirements.

3.1.2 **Written Response Overview**

The Council received four responses in total via email, three of which had concerns but did not specify that they supported or did not support the proposal. The other response was from Estyn acknowledging the positives of the proposal. Please refer to **Appendix 5** for the three redacted correspondence and **Appendix 6** for the Estyn Response.

3.2 **Response Summary**

The Council received 128 survey responses in total, an overview of which can be found in **Appendix 7**. The data below provides an overview of the correspondence outcomes in terms of the level of support for the proposal:

• Fully support the proposal	- 112 (87.5%)
• Do not support the proposal	- 11 (8.6%)
• 5 that did not comment just provided view	- 5 (3.9%)

A total of 94 respondents (73%) provided additional comments on the proposal. Thirty-four of the 128 participants (26.6%) chose not to comment and instead only indicated their preferred option. Of the comments submitted (94), 11 (11.7%) did not support the proposal, while 83 (88.3%) expressed support.

The breakdown of respondents who supported, did not support, or provided no comments, along with their respective consultee categories, is detailed below. Number of respondents 128

- 22 **Teachers**: 21 support the proposal, 1 does not support the proposal
- 4 **Governors**: 3 don't support the proposal 1 not against proposal
- 31 **Parents**: 29 support the proposal, 1 does not support the proposal and 1 no response
- 26 **Local residents**: 25 fully support the proposal 1 no response
- 18 **Non-teaching staff**: 14 fully support the proposal, 3 do not support the proposal and 1 no response
- 27 **Other**: 23 supports the proposal, 3 do not support the proposal and 1 no response

Out of the respondents via the survey of 34/128 who didn't comment:

- 33 supported the proposal
- 1 didn't comment if they supported or didn't support the proposal

3.2.1

Social Media Engagement

The Corporate Communication team were able to establish social media interactions and engagement with consultation posts, a summary of which is detailed below (for more information please refer to **Appendix 8**):

A total of 6 Council posts (outbound) were made via Facebook & Instagram, an assessment of which revealed:

- A Facebook reach of 12,000
 - 9th January 2026 - 6,891 - 11 shares - 143 clicks
 - 16th January 2026 3,273 - 4 shares - 46 clicks
- Instagram
 - 9th January 2026 - 92 impressions
 - 16th January 2026 - 63 impressions

Via Welsh- medium Instagram

- 9th January 2026 - 5 impressions
- 16th January 2026 - 10 impressions

3.3

Thematic Analysis

The Education Resources and Planning team employed an extensive thematic analysis methodology in assessing the views of the consultees. This method is one of the most common used in qualitative research and is utilised to identify patterns. The emergent themes and patterns are important to the questions posed, in highlighting the impact of the proposal, which in turn will support Cabinet to make an informed decision on how to proceed. This process is interpretive; however, interpretation risks are largely mitigated by the presentation of all responses received (please refer to **Appendices 5, 6 and 7** for an overview of all comments, views and responses). In **Appendix 7**, the comments from respondents who support the proposal and those who do not support the proposal have been separated; however, all comments have been incorporated into the overall analysis presented in **Appendix 9**.

3.3.1

The primary themes arising from the analysis of responses along with the frequency is detailed in **Appendix 9**. Overall there are 32 themes that emerged, the top 6 in terms of frequency are :

- No more space in existing school – 50 times
- Proposal will be a positive impact on learners which will make provision purposeful - 37 times
- Learners' needs are not being met - 34 times
- The need for a new building/school/extension - 27 times
- Staff are stretched to capacity - 27 times
- Are the consultation plans big enough? - 21 times

3.3.2

The themes identified reflect consultees' views on the most important considerations and aspects of the proposal that they felt the Council should take forward. As noted above, a number of respondents commented that there is no additional space within the existing buildings to increase capacity (50). Conversely, consultees also highlighted the positive elements of the proposal, including the benefits of making the provision more purposeful (37).

3.4 In recent years, school organisation consultations have tended to receive a higher proportion of negative responses than positive ones. However, it is important to highlight that this consultation generated a greater level of support than challenge.

3.5 **Children & Young People's responses**

Pen y Cwm Special School were engaged within the consultation process, (**Appendix 4**) in order to support the engagement of both children and young people. However, no meetings were arranged with either the Youth Forum or the School Grand Council as there were no opportunities to present to the groups.

3.5.1 **ESTYN Response**

A formal Estyn response was received during the consultation period and based on the consultation document. The full response is provided in **Appendix 6**.

Estyn concluded that:

'The document outlines Estyn's response to Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's proposal to expand Pen y Cwm Special School's capacity from 175 to 205 places by September 2026, with an additional 45 places by 2030/31, reaching a total of 250 learners. The proposal also includes relocating post-16 provision to a permanent facility at Vision House, Ebbw Vale, addressing the increasing demand for places for children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) in the Borough.'

Proposal Overview: Increase school capacity to address oversubscription and waiting lists. Relocate post-16 provision to a permanent site at Vision House, Ebbw Vale.

Rationale and Benefits: Addresses sufficiency issues for ALN placements in the Borough, improves educational standards, teaching quality & learning environments, financial sustainability, provides better facilities for pupils with ALN, including specialist rooms and spaces for healthcare professionals.

Risks and Mitigation: Identified risks include placement and financial challenges, stakeholder concerns, and environmental impacts. Mitigation strategies are outlined but lack detail on alternative options if funding is not approved.

Educational Impact: Positive impact on disability as a protected characteristic. Benefits for families with children requiring ALN education within the Borough. Lack of detailed plans for improving learning experiences and well-being of ALN pupils.

Community and Language Impact: Positive impact on health and well-being of pupils. No negative impact on Welsh-medium education or the Welsh language.

Financial Considerations: Minimal capital costs for expanding the current site. Significant costs (between £8m and £15m) for the new post-16 facility, subject to council approval.

Staffing and Transition: No impact on existing staff; potential new opportunities for post-16 staff. HR support for new appointments, but no detailed plans for recruiting staff with ALN expertise.

Overall, Estyn finds the proposal reasonable and likely to improve ALN provision, but notes areas where further detail is needed, particularly regarding educational benefits, transition arrangements, and funding alternatives.

3.5.2

The Council's Response to ESTYN

Thank you for providing a detailed and comprehensive evaluation of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's proposal to extend the capacity further at Pen y Cwm Special School. The Council appreciate the thorough analysis and constructive feedback provided. Below is acknowledgement to the key points raised:

Proposal Overview: Education acknowledge the need to address the increasing demand for ALN placements within the County Borough and agree that the proposed expansion and relocation of post-16 provision are necessary steps to meet this demand effectively.

Rationale and Benefits: The Council are pleased that Estyn recognises the strategic rationale behind the proposal and its potential to improve educational standards, teaching quality, and financial sustainability. This will ensure that the additional facilities and resources are designed to meet the diverse needs of learners with ALN.

Risks and Mitigation: Having acknowledged the risks identified in the response; work will continue to be undertaken strengthening our mitigation strategies. Specifically, the Resources and Planning Team will work closely with Finance to develop contingency plans in addressing potential funding challenges and ensure stakeholder engagement throughout the process.

Educational Impact: Education appreciate Estyn's recognition of the positive impact on disability as a protected characteristic and the benefits for families within the Borough. Further detail on how the proposal will enhance learning experiences and well-being for ALN pupils, including specific strategies to support their transition to post-16 provision, will be developed.

Community and Language Impact: There is commitment by the Council to ensuring the proposal has a positive impact on the learners health and well-being across the school estate not just Special Schools. All Schools in Blaenau Gwent are engaged with Welsh medium at the levels of learners. Welsh is spoken in the Special Schools and supports the Welsh in Education 10-year Strategic Plan and the Welsh Language Act (2025) and where possible ensure alignment with these frameworks.

Financial Considerations: the Education Resources and Planning Team acknowledge the concerns regarding the significant capital costs for a new post-16 facility/extension. This proposal for new facility will be delivered in line with Sustainable Communities for Learning Funding where options are currently being appraised.

Staffing and Transition: The Council's Organisation Development team will work with the Headteacher to develop a detailed plan for recruiting staff with relevant ALN expertise to support the expanded capacity and new post-16 provision. Additionally, we will enhance the transition arrangements for post-16 pupils to ensure their specific needs are met effectively.

Overall, the Council appreciate Estyn's feedback and will take the recommendations into account to refine and strengthen the proposal where necessary. Blaenau Gwent's goal remains to provide high-quality education

and care for learners with ALN, ensuring their needs are met within the County Borough and improving their overall learning experiences and well-being. Thank you for your continued support and guidance.

3.6 Conclusion of Consultation

In conclusion, the consultation process has demonstrated widespread support for the proposal, with 112 out of 128 respondents indicating their agreement. Both consultees and the Council recognise the need to address increased pupil capacity and the requirement for additional building space to support specialist learning, while ensuring that the quality of specialist provision remains uncompromised throughout.

The Resources and Planning team (Education) remains committed to delivering the proposal, and Pen y Cwm Special School is supportive in principle, subject to securing additional building space to meet learners' needs. The proposed two-phased approach will support the effective management of current pressures while enabling the Council, the school, and key stakeholders to work collaboratively in developing an effective and sustainable long-term solution.

Appendix 10 provides the Council's responses to the Thematic Analysis.

3.7 Options for Recommendation

There are 2 options associated with the consultation, as follows:

- **Option 1** – Cabinet considers and accepts the out-turn report, associated documents and course of action, including proceeding to Statutory Notice.
- **Option 2** – Cabinet provides comments in relation to improvements that can be made in relation to the proposed course of action, in consideration of the School Organisation Code (2018) and established timeline.

4.0 Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan

In accordance with the Welsh Government School Organisation Code (2018), there is a statutory requirement for Councils to consult upon and publish school reorganisation proposals. Education is a strategic priority within the Corporate Plan. In order to enable people to 'Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent'.

In addition, the proposal would support the Directorate's vision:

'Empowering our communities to be ambitious, ethically informed, life-long learners who lead full and healthy lives' This proposal also reflects the Marmot Principles by addressing the social determinants of health through education. High-quality, accessible education is a key driver in reducing health inequalities and 'Giving every child the best start in life'.

5.0

Implications Against Each Option

5.1

Impact on Budget (short- and long-term impact)

The capital costs for Part 1 of the proposal, the creation of the Post 16 temporary provision at Unit 4 Festival Site were approximately £150,000 and was met from Welsh Government's ALN capital grant. There are capital financial implications associated with Part 2 of this proposal for the Council, which will be subject to Capital Programme and full business case approval by Welsh Government, as part of the Sustainable Communities for Learning – Rolling Programme. This is estimated to be between £3m – £15m dependent on the preferred option being determined, following a full options appraisal.

Pen Y Cwm Special School is funded in line with Blaenau Gwent Council's Fair Funding policy. Like all other schools in the area, its funding is determined by pupil numbers and the size of the school premises, however it also attracts funding in relation to its special school category.

Accurately forecasting the financial impact of increasing capacity is challenging. To illustrate, the funding requirements based on pupil numbers, the current allocation for 175 pupils in 2025/26 is approximately £4.45 million, which includes Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU), other factors and category-specific funding. As pupil numbers increase in line with the proposed expansion, there will be corresponding rises in premises and staffing costs resulting in a cost pressure for the Council. The business case / options appraisal will detail the potential impact of each scenario on both the Council and other school settings. Cost mitigations to minimise the financial impact will need to be explored as part of the appraisal.

Transport costs associated with Part 1, did not involve any additional cost for the school in academic year 2024/25 as pupils were dropped off at both sites using existing arrangements. However, for the 2025/26 academic year, two additional buses have been required to accommodate increased pupil numbers, with forecasted annual costs totalling £76,950. These costs have been absorbed with in the Home to School transport budget. Despite this, a local solution such as placement at Pen Y Cwm offers better value for money compared to the transport costs associated with out-of-county provision.

5.2

Risk including Mitigating Actions

If the proposal is not progressed, there is a significant risk regarding both learner placements and financial implications. This includes challenges in securing appropriate ALN provision within and outside the county, leading to increased costs for out-of-county placements and additional Home-to-School Transport.

Conversely, the risks associated with implementing the proposal relate to an increase in the funding formula for Pen-y-Cwm Special School and the potential impact on other educational settings. However, these risks are outweighed by the substantial financial and operational consequences of not proceeding.

5.3 ***Legal***
Legal advice has been sought in relation to the consultation document.

5.4 ***Human Resources***
The proposal to increase pupil numbers will require the Governing Body of Pen y Cwm School to plan proactively for future workforce requirements in preparation for the expansion in capacity. Organisational Development will provide the Governing Body with advice, support, and guidance throughout the workforce process.

5.5 ***Health and Safety***
There is no anticipated impact on Health and Safety. Periodic reviews are undertaken by the Health and Safety Officer, and any concerns identified are addressed accordingly. The provision of additional building capacity will significantly reduce and mitigate potential Health and Safety issues by alleviating overcrowding and ensuring that spaces remain suitable and safe for learners and staff.

6.0 ***Supporting Evidence***

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***
Please refer to the Consultation document (**Appendix 1**) relating to the proposal.

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***
The public can expect a fair and equitable consultation process, which is fully compliant with the Welsh Government School Organisation Code (2018).

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***
Stakeholder engagement is a key focus of all school organisation proposals. The proposal will be subject to consultation in line with the Welsh Government School Organisation Code (2018), which will then be used to inform decision making processes moving forward. i.e. move to Statutory Notice Period.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***
The consultation details a proposal which looks to create additional places in Pen y Cwm Special school in line with local demand for places for the long-term development and sustainability of the education system in Blaenau Gwent. A further consideration i.e. expansion/extension in terms of building spaces and specialist equipment will be required to meet all the demand, this will be subject to an options appraisal and full business case to Welsh Government, any development will take on board the comments from the consultation with regards to additional learning spaces.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***
The proposal seeks to address sustainability issues associated with the future growth and development of special School placements in the County Borough.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
The consultation along with the development of the proposal has been developed collaboratively with both the Inclusion Team, Headteachers, Finance, and Neighbourhood Services.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***
The proposal seeks to secure integration for new and existing pupils in special school placements supporting growth and sustainability of provision for the future needs of learners.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***
By having provision locally it will address the Green Agenda reducing carbon emissions for learners travelling excessively for their educational needs.

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) (All decisions, policy reviews or policy implementation will now require a completed Integrated Impact Assessment) To note a screening template no longer needs to be completed,***
The Resources and Planning Team have completed an IIA which is still accessible via the Webpage link to this consultation.

7. ***Monitoring Arrangements***

7.1 There will be extensive monitoring by the Education Resources and Planning team in line with the consultation processes, responses and outcomes which would be answered, analysed and taken via the Council's political processes.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix1 Consultation Document	 PYC Consultation document Fv 1.12.25 f
Appendix 2 Consultee List	 Appendix 2 Consultee List.docx
Appendix 3 List of Sessions (including the number of participants)	 Appendix 3.docx
Appendix 4 Learner Responses on what they need	 Appendix 4 Session held at Pen y Cwm Sp
Appendix 5 Redacted Correspondence Log	 Appendix 5 redacted responses.docx
Appendix 6 Estyn Response	 Estyn Response to Pen y Cwm Special Sc
Appendix 7 Overview of Survey	 Pen y Cwm Consultation Thema
Appendix 8 Views and Comments Captured via Social Media	 Appendix 8 Social Media posts.docx
Appendix 9 Thematic Analysis	 Appendix 9 Pen y Cwm Consultation The
Appendix 10 Thematic Analysis and Council Responses	 Appendix 10 thematic analysis and Council A