

Committee: Council
Date of meeting: 15th July 2026
Report Subject: Objection Report on the Proposal to Decrease the Capacity at Abertillery Learning Community Primary Phase
Portfolio Holder: Cabinet Member Children, Young People & Families
Report Submitted by: Chief Education Officer
Report Author: Head of Resources & Planning, Education

Key Messages

- This report summarises the outcome of the formal objection period in relation to the proposal to reduce the capacity of the primary phase of Abertillery Learning Community through the closure of the Roseheyworth Road Campus.
- 389 valid objections were received during the statutory notice period. Two alternative options were put forward for consideration.
- Having carefully considered all objections received and the supporting evidence, the Council acknowledges the strength of stakeholder concern regarding the proposal. However, no viable alternative has been identified that would effectively address declining pupil numbers, significant surplus capacity and ongoing financial pressures.
- The proposal is therefore considered to be the most appropriate, proportionate and sustainable option to address the surplus capacity and financial risks whilst continuing to improve the quality of provision across Abertillery Learning Community.
- It is recommended that Council accepts the Objections Report and associated documentation and approves the proposal to reduce the capacity of the primary phase of Abertillery Learning Community from 980 to 770 places through the closure of the Roseheyworth Road Campus, with learners transferring to the remaining campuses by September 2027.
- If approved, appropriate transition planning will be implemented to support learners, staff and the wider community and to minimise disruption for learners.

1.	Purpose of the Report
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an overview of the objections received during the statutory objection period in relation to the proposal to reduce the capacity of the primary phase of Abertillery Learning Community through the closure of the Roseheyworth Road Campus.
1.2	The report summarises the objections received, identifies the key themes raised and sets out the consideration of those issues, including any proposed mitigation. Council is asked to consider the Objections Report and to approve the proposal for implementation from September 2027.

2.	Background
2.1	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council established Abertillery Learning Community in September 2016 as an all-through school comprising three primary campuses located at Roseheyworth Road, Six Bells and Tillery Street, together with a secondary campus at Alma Street.
2.2	Since implementation, pupil numbers across the county borough have declined, reflecting wider demographic trends and falling birth rates. This has resulted in increasing levels of surplus capacity across parts of the school estate. Current projections indicate that this trend is likely to continue, creating ongoing challenges in relation to the efficient use of resources, financial sustainability and long-term education planning.
2.3	Statutory Consultation and Consultation Conclusions Education undertook a formal statutory consultation during March and April 2026 in accordance with the Welsh Government School Organisation Code. The proposal constitutes a regulated alteration because it involves the closure of the Roseheyworth Road Campus and a reduction in the capacity of the primary phase of Abertillery Learning Community. The consultation generated extensive feedback from a wide range of stakeholders. The significant level of opposition expressed by parents, staff and local residents was acknowledged and carefully considered alongside the rationale for the proposal, including declining pupil numbers, surplus capacity and financial sustainability challenges. A number of alternative options were suggested, including reducing physical building capacity, adopting a multi-phase campus model and redistributing pupils across existing sites. These options were assessed as either impractical, non-compliant with Welsh Government guidance or ineffective in addressing the underlying issues, particularly financial sustainability. Consequently, they were not considered viable alternatives. Professional advice and feedback from the School Improvement Service and statutory consultees, including Estyn, provided assurance that the proposal would at least maintain educational standards, enhance the quality of provision and support long-term sustainability.
2.3	Publication of the Statutory Notice The consultation outturn report for the statutory proposal was presented to Cabinet on 30th April 2026. Having fully considered

	the consultation responses and reasonable alternatives, Cabinet agreed that the proposal remained the most appropriate, proportionate and deliverable option to address surplus capacity and financial risks, while continuing to fulfil its statutory duties in relation to educational standards. Cabinet therefore agreed to progress to publication of a statutory notice for the preferred option set out below: To reduce the capacity of the primary phase of Abertillery Learning Community from 980 to 770 places; reducing the physical capacity of the Learning Community by closing the Roseheyworth Road Campus; and transferring pupils to the remaining primary campuses at Six Bells and Tillery Street, with full implementation by September 2027. Following Cabinet approval, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council published the statutory notice on 5 May 2026, commencing a 28-day objection period which concluded on 3 June 2026. This report has been prepared for Members to consider the objections received during that statutory objection period.
3.	Issues and Findings
3.1	A total of 390 responses were received during the statutory objection period, comprising 84 email objections and 306 hand-delivered objections submitted to the Council's General Offices. One response was subsequently withdrawn, leaving 389 valid objections for consideration. All valid objections opposed the proposal. Of the responses received: • 228 objections opposed the proposal but did not provide specific reasons. • 158 objections provided reasons which have been analysed and categorised within Appendix 1 – Objection Report. • 3 of these responses were received from learners. Email submissions were acknowledged directly. Hand-delivered submissions were recorded within the Council's objections log. Whilst all objections have been considered, it has not been possible to undertake thematic analysis of responses where no supporting reasons were provided.
3.2	Thematic Analysis - The objections received have been reviewed and grouped into key themes to support a structured analysis of the issues raised. These themes are considered in detail within Appendix 1. Council responses and mitigation measures relating to these themes have also been collated within Appendix 1. The principal themes identified were:

	Theme 1 Education Impact and Equality Theme 2 Wellbeing and Vulnerable learners Theme 3 Community Impact & Cohesion Theme 4 ALN Provision Theme 5 Transport, Safety and Accessibility Theme 6 Financial Concerns / Value for Money Theme 7 Personal Experience Narratives Theme 8 Capacity, Planning and Projections Theme 9 Consultation Process / Trust Issues Theme 10 Childcare / Wraparound Provision Theme 11 Policy / Legal Compliance Theme 12 Governance and Transparency
3.3	Two alternative options were received for consideration during the objection period. These two options are outlined below and capture the Council's analysis and response to those alternative options. These options are in addition to the three options already considered within the consultation outturn document. The Council considers that its previous analysis remains valid and that those options are still not viable or proportionate alternatives. Consultation Outturn report – Appendix 2 – item 3.12
3.3.1	Alternative Option 1 received and considered during the Objection Period: Proposal to move half of the learners from the Abertillery Learning Community primary site of Tillery Street Campus to Roseheyworth Campus. Conclusion While redistribution may appear to offer a compromise, it does not resolve the core challenges of declining numbers, surplus capacity and financial sustainability. Therefore this is not considered a viable or proportionate alternative.
3.3.2	Alternative Option 2 received and considered during the Objection Period: Proposal to use the Roseheyworth Campus for additional training capacity. Conclusion Abertillery Learning Community's primary focus must be the delivery of statutory education. Retaining the Roseheyworth Campus specifically for training does not address the fundamental challenges of surplus capacity or financial sustainability. This is therefore not considered a viable alternative.

4.	Strategic Context, Implications and Impacts
4.1	In accordance with the Welsh Government <i>School Organisation Code (2018)</i>, Local Authorities have a statutory duty to consult on and publish proposals for school reorganisation. Education is a strategic priority within the Council's Corporate Plan, supporting the objective to <i>maximise learning and skills for all in order to create a prosperous, thriving and resilient Blaenau Gwent</i>. The proposal also supports the Directorate's vision of <i>empowering communities to be ambitious, ethically informed, lifelong learners who lead full and healthy lives</i>. In doing so, it reflects the Marmot Principles by addressing the social determinants of health through education, recognising that high-quality, accessible education is a key driver in reducing health inequalities and in <i>giving every child the best start in life</i>.
4.2	Financial Implications
4.2.1	Individual Schools Budget In February 2025, in addition to funding nationally agreed pay awards, the Council approved a further £2.44 million increase to the Individual Schools Budget for both 2025/26 and 2026/27 to provide additional financial support to schools and help manage increasing cost pressures. Despite this investment, the overall outturn position across Blaenau Gwent schools at the end of 2025/26 was a cumulative deficit of approximately £3 million. Schools continue to face increasing financial pressures arising from: • Declining learner numbers and reduced learner-led funding; • Increasing demand for Additional Learning Needs provision; • Rising operational and staffing costs. This proposal forms part of the Council's wider approach to improving the sustainability of the school estate and supporting schools to achieve greater financial resilience.
4.2.2	At the end of the 2025/26 financial year, total funding for the Abertillery Learning Community was £11.1million, with an outturn deficit position of £558,000. If no action is taken, this deficit is expected to increase to £1.3m by 31st March 2027 and increase significantly to approximately £3.4m by 2029/30. This proposal will support the school in moving closer to achieving an in-year balanced budget by delivering annual cost reductions of approximately £670,000. Over five years, these savings are expected to total around £2.2 million, significantly reducing the deficit referred to above.

4.2.3	Capital Costs - There are minimal capital costs associated with this proposal. Minor works will be required across the remaining two campuses to enable accommodation of additional learners. These works are estimated to cost approximately £100,000 and would be financed from existing maintenance budgets.
4.2.4	An analysis of the proposal's home-to-school transport impact indicates that only a small number of learners are likely to qualify for transport, resulting in an estimated additional annual cost of £30,000. Eligibility will continue to be assessed under the Council's Home to School Transport Policy, underpinned by Welsh Government guidance on minimum statutory entitlements (age and distance). The Council can also apply discretionary transport support for vulnerable families, on a case-by-case basis.
4.3	Risks and Mitigation The risks associated with this proposal have been carefully considered below:
4.3.1	Financial Sustainability Risk (Do Nothing / Delay) If the proposal is not progressed or is delayed, there is a significant financial risk associated with maintaining four primary campuses in the context of declining pupil numbers and increasing budget pressures. This will result in continued growth in deficit balances, reduced ability to invest in teaching and learning and a risk to the long-term sustainability of provision. Mitigation The Council will continue to monitor the school's financial position through established budget management processes, including ongoing review of learner projections, funding levels and site running costs. The analysis to date has confirmed that operating four campuses is not financially sustainable. If the proposal does not proceed, alternative measures would be required, including further review of the school estate, workforce restructuring and identification of efficiency savings. Failure to act will defer rather than resolve these issues and will result in more significant and disruptive interventions in the near future.
4.3.2	Transport, Accessibility and Safety Risk There is a risk that the proposal may increase pressure on home to school transport, alongside concerns relating to traffic congestion, parking and pedestrian safety at receiving campuses. Mitigation The Council will mitigate these risks through a comprehensive transport and traffic management approach. This includes detailed assessment of learner travel patterns, application of the Home to School Transport Policy, and ongoing review of eligibility and demand. Initial analysis indicates that the majority of learners will

	remain within walking distance of the receiving campuses, with only a small number likely to require additional transport provision. In addition, the Council will work in partnership with Neighbourhood Services and other relevant teams to implement practical traffic management and safety measures, including consideration of school access arrangements, pedestrian routes and localised congestion. Safe walking routes are already in place across all campuses, however these will be reviewed and, where necessary, improvements will be made.
4.3.3	Workforce and Staffing Risk There is a risk of staffing reductions, including potential redundancies, arising from the consolidation of provision. Mitigation The Council will work closely with Human Resources, school leadership and recognised Trade Unions to manage workforce changes through established consultation processes. The approach will prioritise minimising compulsory redundancies through natural turnover, redeployment and cross-matching opportunities. Clear communication and appropriate wellbeing support will be provided to staff throughout the process, ensuring that changes are managed in a fair, transparent and supportive manner while maintaining continuity for learners.
4.3.4	Educational Disruption and Learner Wellbeing Risk There is a risk that learners may experience disruption to their education and wellbeing during the transition between campuses. Mitigation A comprehensive and phased transition plan will be developed and led by the school's leadership team, with a strong focus on maintaining continuity of education and safeguarding learner wellbeing. This will include familiarisation visits, transition activities, retention of friendship groups where possible, and continuity of staffing arrangements. Additional pastoral and wellbeing support will be provided, particularly for vulnerable learners. Educational outcomes, attendance and wellbeing will be monitored closely throughout the transition to ensure any issues are identified and addressed promptly.
4.3.5	Future Capacity and Place Planning Risk There is a risk that future increases in pupil numbers could place pressure on capacity within the remaining campuses. Mitigation The proposal is informed by detailed pupil projections, including birth rates and local demographic trends, which indicate a continuing decline in demand. In addition, a suitable level of

	contingency has been incorporated to accommodate potential future fluctuations in learner numbers.
4.4	Risk Conclusion The risks associated with implementing the proposal are recognised and will require active management. However, these risks are considered manageable through the mitigation measures outlined in this report. Conversely, the risks associated with not progressing the proposal are considered more significant. These include continued surplus capacity and increasing financial deficits, which over time will affect the school's ability to maintain and improve educational standards and deliver the best possible outcomes for learners.
5.	Consultation and Engagement
5.1	The consultation has been undertaken in line with the Welsh Government School Organisation Code (2018) which places a statutory duty on Local Authorities to consult on and publish proposals relating to school organisation. A wide range of stakeholders were engaged, including parents/carers, learners, staff, governors, elected members, trade unions and the wider community, through a combination of methods such as publication of a comprehensive consultation document, targeted distribution to identified consultees, online and written response mechanisms, and a programme of engagement events. These included face-to-face drop-in sessions, virtual meetings and dedicated sessions for learners.
6.	Monitoring, Delivery and Accountability
6.1	The proposal will be monitored through the Council's established governance and reporting arrangements. If approved, Education will lead implementation through a comprehensive transition plan, ensuring learners' needs remain central. Support will be provided for learners, staff and families to maintain continuity of education, safeguard learner wellbeing and minimise disruption. Feedback from the consultation and objection periods will inform transition planning and mitigation, particularly in relation to learner wellbeing, Additional Learning Needs provision, transport and community impact. Education will work closely with school leaders, governors, staff, parents/carers and other stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition with minimal impact on learners. Progress will be monitored through key performance indicators, including attendance, attainment, wellbeing and operational delivery. Risks will be recorded in a formal risk register and reviewed regularly to ensure appropriate action is taken.
7.	Recommendation, Decision and Committee Activity

7.1	Having considered all objections received, the consultation evidence and supporting documentation, officers remain satisfied that the proposal is a necessary, proportionate and deliverable response to the challenges facing Abertillery Learning Community. These challenges include sustained surplus capacity, declining pupil numbers and increasing financial pressures, which present a significant risk to the long-term sustainability of education provision if left unaddressed. While the strength of stakeholder opposition is recognised, the objections have not identified a viable alternative that would more effectively address these challenges. The proposal has been subject to extensive scrutiny through the statutory consultation and objection processes, including consideration of its educational, financial, operational and community impacts. The Impact Assessments have been regularly updated throughout the process and are included at Appendices 3 and 4. Professional advice from Estyn and the Council's School Improvement Service indicates that the proposal is likely to maintain and enhance educational outcomes, while supporting the long-term sustainability of provision. Council is therefore asked to consider the evidence as a whole, including consultation feedback, objection analysis and the Council's statutory responsibilities, when determining the proposal. Recommended options There are 2 options associated with the report, as follows: Option 1 – Council considers and accepts the Objections Report, associated documents and course of action, to implement the proposal for September 2027. Option 2 – Council considers the Objection Report, does not proceed to Implementation and identifies alternative options to address the identified risk including financial deficit.
Appendices	
<i>Include supporting information</i> Objections report – Appendix 1 Appendix 1-Objections Report.p	

**Consultation
Outturn
Report –
Appendix 2**



abertillery-learning-
community-outturn-

**IIA –
Integrated
Impact
Assessment
– Appendix 3**



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**CIA –
Community
Impact
Assessment
– Appendix 4**



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