

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>13 JANUARY 2026</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>SCHOOL MODERNISATION PROGRAMME REPLACEMENT HERONSBIDGE SCHOOL - MODIFICATION TO SCHOOL OPENING</b>
<b>Report Owner / Responsible Chief Officer / Cabinet Member</b>	<b>CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION AND YOUTH SERVICES</b> <b>CORPORATE DIRECTOR – EDUCATION, EARLY YEARS AND YOUNG PEOPLE</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>GAYNOR THOMAS MANAGER, SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FOR LEARNING</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>There is no effect upon policy framework or procedure rules.</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Approval is sought to modify the opening date of the replacement Heronsbridge School.</b></li> </ul>

## 1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval to modify the opening date of the replacement Heronsbridge School to the beginning of the autumn term 2028.

## 2. Background

2.1 On 6 December 2017, the Welsh Government Department for Education gave 'approval in principle' for Bridgend's second wave of investment to support the School Modernisation Programme, which at that stage had an estimated cost envelope of £68.2m. Further costs were to be determined, and these would be associated with additional infrastructure capacity.

2.2 In January 2018, Council approved, in principle, the financial commitment required, subject to sufficient resources being identified and allocated to meet the match funding commitment.

- 2.3 In January 2020, Cabinet was presented with the outcome of the extensive options appraisal relating to each of the approved projects.
- 2.4 In December 2020, Cabinet/Corporate Management Board (CCMB) endorsed the preferred 'Do maximum' option for Heronsbridge School (that is, a new-build school for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties plus residential provision). The school would be sized to accommodate 300 pupils. This was reflected in the strategic outline business case, which was subsequently submitted to Welsh Government for consideration.
- 2.5 In December 2020, Council approval was received to include funding in the Capital Programme to deal with payments associated with securing land.
- 2.6 In March 2021, Ministerial approval was received in respect of the Strategic Outline Business Case for a replacement 300-place Heronsbridge School, plus residential provision.
- 2.7 Ministerial approval of the Welsh Government Outline Business Case was received in November 2021.
- 2.8 The outcome of the feasibility study to consider the development of the school on privately owned land at Island Farm, Bridgend was reported to Cabinet on 8 March 2022 and approval was received to commence a statutory consultation process to make regulated alterations to Heronsbridge School to increase the number of pupils for whom the school makes provision to 300 and to relocate the school from its current location at Ewenny Road, Bridgend to Island Farm, Bridgend.
- 2.9 In June 2022, Cabinet was informed of the outcome of the statutory consultation process and gave approval to publish the consultation report and statutory notice in respect of the proposal. The statutory notice was published on 30 June 2022 and no objections were received in respect of the proposal. On 18 October 2022, the outcome of the statutory process was reported to Cabinet, who determined to proceed and modify the proposal so that the school opens at the beginning of the spring term 2026, to allow time for meaningful stakeholder engagement to take place in respect of the design development.
- 2.10 On 18 October 2022, a subsequent report regarding the procurement strategy for the replacement school received Cabinet approval.
- 2.11 The Remodeling Children's Residential Services Project was formed in 2017-2018 as part of the Remodelling Children's Services Programme. The remit of the project was to review current residential provision (to include residential homes and out-of-county placements) and to develop a proposed new residential and accommodation model. As part of the remodelling programme, Harwood House was secured on the current Heronsbridge School site, and a refurbishment was completed to meet regulations and enable registration with Care Inspectorate Wales.
- 2.12 The service has delivered on the business case outcomes, which was to mitigate the need to place children out-of-county in what have traditionally been very high-cost placements. However, there are limitations in terms of the physical aspect of the

property, with it being unable to accommodate wheelchair users, which restricts the service accommodating children and young people with a physical disability.

- 2.13 In December 2020, CCMB endorsed the option for relocating Heronsbridge School onto a new site where, due to service and financial benefits, it was agreed for Harwood House to continue to be co-located with the school, and to be included in future design and build plans.
- 2.14 A tender process to procure the services of a multi-disciplinary design team via the South East Wales Technical and Professional Services Framework to develop the design of the school through to the end of Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Stage 2 has been undertaken. The appointed team, AECOM, has undertaken the necessary consultation, brief development, and design development under a Professional Services Contract (PSC), which has resulted in a RIBA Stage 2 design and cost plan.
- 2.15 In March 2024, CCMB endorsed a proposal to submit a revised Outline Business Case (OBC) to Welsh Government to include a revised 'do maximum' option to include a swimming pool to be delivered as part of the project, and to detail the increased cost of the scheme (based on the RIBA Stage 2 design and increased market rates). CCMB also supported the continued development of the scheme to tender stage.
- 2.16 On 25 September 2024, the Cabinet Secretary for Education approved the revised OBC and gave approval to proceed to Full Business Case (FBC) stage.
- 2.17 The increased cost of the scheme has resulted in additional Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) funding being required to meet the local authority's 25% contribution for the replacement school. This matter was reported to Council in November 2024, and the additional funding was approved for inclusion in the capital programme.
- 2.18 In January 2025, Cabinet approval was received to tender the scheme, (including the specialist children's residential provision (that is, Harwood House)) to appoint a design and build contractor (that is, a two stage contract) via the South East and Mid Wales Collaborative Construction Framework (SEWSCAP4) as a mini competition of Lot 9 of the framework.
- 2.19 The outcome of the above tender process was reported to Cabinet in June 2025, and approval was received to appoint Kier Construction to undertake the Stage 1 pre-construction services and enter into a Professional Services Contract with the company to continue the design development process.
- 2.20 Also June 2025, Cabinet was reminded that there had been delays in delivering this scheme (that is, due to the increased funding required to deliver the scheme, as a result of cost increases experienced by the construction industry which had impacted on appointing a design and build contractor), and consequently, the planned opening date of January 2026 would no longer be achievable. Cabinet was advised that a future report in this regard would be presented once the contractor had been appointed and had input into the programme.

### **3. Current situation**

3.1 Following their appointment, Kier Construction has made good progress in respect of the design development. The company has reviewed the Royal Institute of British Architects Stage 2 design and are progressing the scheme through the next stage of development. The company has undertaken extensive engagement with key stakeholders including the school and technical officers of the local authority.

3.2 As part of their work, Kier Construction has developed the programme to completion, with review and input from AECOM and officers. Consideration has been given to all the activities and the necessary approvals required to deliver the scheme, including:

- time to conclude the design development process;
- a requirement for ground investigation work and potential remediation of the site;
- a requirement to obtain SAB (SuDs (Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems) Approval Body) and planning approvals;
- the Council's processes to enter a construction contract;
- the timescales associated with Welsh Government's FBC process and obtaining the necessary approvals; and
- the timing of next year's Senedd elections, and the restrictions around decision-making in the pre-election period.

3.3 Having considered the above, it is proposed to modify the school opening date to the beginning of the autumn term, 2028. Any slippage beyond this date would also require the Council to recommence the statutory consultation process.

3.4 There are risks associated with the timing of the approvals, decisions and potential ground remediation as detailed in paragraph 3.2, which could impact on the programme. However, the project team will work with Kier Construction and AECOM to identify opportunities to mitigate those risks so that they do not impact on the proposed opening date (for example, undertake enabling works, progress certain activities concurrently).

3.5 The local authority has consulted with the Headteacher and the Chair of Heronsbridge School's Governing Body regarding the proposed modification and there is no objection to the proposed revised date. They have confirmed that it is in line with their expectation and allows time for the Governing Body to ensure a smooth transition into the new school. They have also indicated that they appreciate all the work that officers, AECOM and Kier Construction are undertaking in respect of the design development. Welsh Government officials have also been consulted regarding this matter and confirmed that the proposed revised date complies with the requirements of the School Organisation Code, 2018.

#### **4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)**

4.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, on socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh language. It is therefore not necessary to conduct a full EIA on this policy or proposal. There have been positive impacts identified, including disability and gender.

**5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives**

5.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Assessment provides a comprehensive summary of the outcomes expected from the implementation of the service.

Long-term	The scheme fulfils the Council's statutory duty to provide sufficient pupil places and will allow teaching and learning to take place in a building and site which is suited to the needs of the pupils and staff.
Prevention	The Council has a statutory duty to ensure there are a sufficient supply of school places, and this scheme will safeguard the Council's position in terms of any potential legal challenge in this regard.
Integration	Providing sufficient places at Heronsbridge School, ensures that the curriculum can be delivered and meets the social, environmental, and cultural objectives of pupils and the community it will serve. This scheme will promote inclusion. Community use of facilities is being explored and, where appropriate, is being incorporated into the design. Construction has been competitively tendered, via a mini competition through the SEWSCAP4 Framework. This provides opportunities for local companies to engage with the main contractor for inclusion in their supply chain, via 'Meet the Buyer' events. This would support economic activity in the area. Social value will be maximised.
Collaboration	The Council will work effectively with the school, Estyn, health, town and community councils and many internal and external partners to ensure that the building meets the short-term and future needs of the users and the community which it will serve. Officers will continue to work with the external designers in developing the scheme to ensure that the building design is sustainable and energy efficient and delivers on the decarbonisation agenda.
Involvement	This scheme was subject to a long list of education and site options. These were systematically evaluated and have been reduced from a long list to a short list to confirm the preferred option. Further work involved the engagement of all potential stakeholders including Cabinet, members, governors, staff, pupils, community, internal and external partners during the consultation exercise. A public consultation process has been undertaken, according to the Welsh Government School Organisation Code 2018. Further stakeholder engagement will continue to take place, informing the design of the replacement school.

As a result of the assessment, it is considered that there will be a positive impact upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives.

## **6. Climate Change and Nature Implications**

6.1 In recognition of the importance of decarbonisation to help protect and sustain the environment over the long term and in line with our climate change ambitions the replacement Heronsbridge School will be Net Zero Carbon.

## **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

7.1 The replacement Heronsbridge School will be developed with a recognition that there is a duty which is reflected under BCBC Safeguarding Policy to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children, young people, and adults at risk of abuse or neglect and to ensure that effective practices are in place throughout the Council and its commissioned services.

## **8. Financial Implications**

8.1 In 2021, Welsh Government approved the OBC for the replacement Heronsbridge School scheme, in which the Council committed to funding £7.884m of the overall £34.504m cost. However, since that time the construction industry has seen costs escalate due to COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, costs of incorporating decarbonisation measures and energy price increases, which has resulted in the projected cost of the scheme significantly increasing to £59.985m.

8.2 In November 2024, Council approved additional BCBC funding of £6.182m to deliver the scheme, and the scheme is now being progressed to FBC stage.

8.3 Once the FBC is submitted, Welsh Government should approve the additional grant match funding of £19.299m to ensure there is sufficient funding overall to meet the estimated scheme costs, which will be added to the capital programme once approved.

8.4 A ground investigation of the Island Farm site will commence in January 2026. Depending on the outcome of this work, the cost of the scheme could change. However, potential remediation costs cannot be confirmed at this stage.

8.5 Any revenue implications resulting because of moving sites, including increases to the school's delegated budget to cover a larger premises areas, and any potential increases in school transport costs, will not be known until the scheme is developed further. These will need to be considered as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy going forward.

8.6 Cabinet will be presented with a future report prior to awarding the main construction contract which sets out the position regarding costs and budget in relation to the replacement Heronsbridge School scheme and Harwood House. Construction contract/s will not be awarded until the necessary funding approvals are in place.

## **9. Recommendations**

9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approval is given to modify the opening date of the replacement Heronsbridge School to the beginning of the autumn term 2028.

## **Background documents**

None