

SUBJECT:	RELOCATION OF PUPIL REFERRAL SERVICE SOUTH MONMOUTHSHIRE
MEETING:	COUNTY COUNCIL
DATE:	7TH DECEMBER 2023
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	

1. PURPOSE:

To seek Council approval and capital investment to relocate the Pupil Referral Service (PRS) from its current location in the south of the county at Hanbury House in Chepstow to the staff houses on the former Mounton House School site in Pwllmeyric.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that Council agree to the capital investment of £1.2m to improve and remodel the accommodation to facilitate this relocation.

That the investment is funded via a budget virement of £500k from the Schools refurbishment grant capital scheme to partially meet the costs of this proposal.

That to the extent that the remaining £700k cannot be met from other identified Education capital grant funding, a maximum of £700k will be funded via prudential borrowing over a 30-year period that will be met from the PRS budget.

3. KEY ISSUES:

3.1 The Pupil Referral Service (PRS) is a responsive service that provides both statutory and non-statutory provision for some of MCC's most vulnerable learners. The PRS is a portfolio provision of four parts.

i A Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) providing a place on roll for pupils who reside in MCC who do not have a school place. Most pupils have been Permanently Excluded (PEX) from school. The number of PEX has increased significantly in recent months. The nature of this provision can require a rapid response at any time/ short notice and is a statutory function of a local authority. Currently the PRU function is split across three sites.

- a. Hanbury House in Chepstow.
- b. Old Library in Abergavenny.
- c. Caerwent Village Hall, temporary site since Easter 2023.

- ii Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) Medical provides for pupils judged too ill to currently attend school. This is a statutory function and requires health or Educational Psychology Service evidence.

Provision is provided through two models; and both include Pupil Engagement Officer (PEO) visits four days in every ten. The models are, either daily online lessons from a PRS teacher, along with access to a Health and Wellbeing group four days per week, or daily in person teaching from a PRS teacher, typically at the child/ young person's home if they are unable to access online learning due to their needs.

Currently the EOTAS staff work from County Hall in terms of planning, preparation, and delivery of online lessons.

- iii EOTAS ALN Bespoke started in MCC in Sept 2022 as a pilot for one pupil. Its function is to provide for MCC pupils, typically with complex Additional Learning Needs (ALN), who do not have a school place. Almost all will have experienced failed out of county specialist placements. These pupils are single registered, and this is a statutory function.
- iv In-reach (or Dalen Newydd) providing support for pupils identified as being at risk of PEX at three of the four Secondary schools. Each school prioritises this resource and the pupils are dual-registered, this is non-statutory function.

- 3.2 The South Monmouthshire PRU has been in Hanbury House since 2014, prior to this it was in Boverton House. Hanbury House is a repurposed office suite located on a busy high street, which does not have access to any appropriate outside space, for either learning or breakout spaces. When the PRS was relocated to Hanbury House it was not repurposed to reflect a school environment. The current accommodation does not enable delivery of the Curriculum for Wales and does not have appropriate facilities in terms of intervention/ break out spaces to enable adults to support young people to regulate their emotions when in crisis, or to access planned therapeutic support and intervention.
- 3.3 This proposal to relocate the South Monmouthshire PRU to the staff houses on the old Mouton House site will have an impact across the PRU provision, as well as for both the EOTAS Medical function and the current EOTAS ALN Bespoke area of work as it will provide a secure base for many PRS staff to work from in the south of the county.

The proposed accommodation will provide dedicated teaching and learning spaces for pupils along with specialist art, science, and life skills areas. There will be areas for outside learning and therapeutic support and intervention. Pupils will be taught in a safe and secure environment. There will also be

dedicated space for teaching staff to deliver EOTAS provision and enable them to collaborate more effectively.

- 3.4 Officers are currently working on a proposal to establish a more permanent, dedicated site in the north of the county which will be subject to a further report This will put the PRS in a far more stable position to meet the increasing demands of the vulnerable population of pupils it serves.
- 3.5 In September 2023 there were 19 pupils in the PRU, currently there are 28 pupils on roll. This is due to an exceptionally high number of permanent exclusions from within MCC and of MCC pupils attending schools in neighbouring counties, since the start of term. Subsequently the three PRU sites are at capacity and as such pupils coming onto roll now are being offered an online learning package until suitable alternatives can be arranged.
- 3.6 A permanent and dedicated PRU in the South of the county would allow all the pupils currently in Hanbury House and Caerwent Village Hall to come together on one site and to benefit from the combined skills and expertise of dedicated PRS staff who are currently working across the two sites.
- 3.7 The numbers of EOTAS Medical pupils also represents a significant pressure for the local authority, with current numbers being around 45 pupils. During the period of 2010-2020 the long-term average was 12-16 pupils per year. This increase demands greater efficiency and consistency in terms of the quality and delivery of the EOTAS provision, and this requires staff to have a base to collaborate around their planning, preparation, and development to ensure that they continue to offer best practice when meeting the needs of these most vulnerable children/ young people.

4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

Positive implications of the relocation of the PRU South include:

- Improved safeguarding due to location of new site and the improved, educationally focused internal spaces and access to suitable outdoor space and parking/ drop off and collection points.
- Improved service offer from PRU will have a positive impact on pupils who are Children Looked After/ Care Experienced.
- The relocation offers a sustainable long terms solution to provision for permanently excluded pupils and those educated other than in school.
- The relocation offers improved curriculum offer for PRS pupils which will improve educational outcomes, the ability of pupils, many with additional learning needs/ vulnerabilities to have better chances at reengaging in education.

See the attached EQIA for more information.

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

Consideration has been given to the following options:

Option	Benefits	Concerns/ Risks	Comments
Do nothing. PRU South remains in Hanbury House.	No costs associated with refurbishment.	Issues around delivery of curriculum, provision of appropriate interventions and safeguarding remain.	This option should be discounted as the LA would struggle to meet statutory duties for pupils who are PEX/ EOTAS.
Relocate all PRS functions to central location.	Some benefits associated with having all staff collocated and resourced on one premises.	No suitable accommodation obviously available and there would be associated refurbishment costs. Transport costs would be high. Takes pupils away from communities/ schools.	This option should be discounted as there is no obvious suitable accommodation available so time scale too long, and potential associated costs unknown/ high.
Develop a North/ South PRU provision with the initial move in the South from Hanbury House to the Pwllmeyric site.	Suitable building is available near to Chepstow, but out of the main town. Pupils and staff at both Hanbury House and Caerwent Village Hall to come together. Provision of office space for PRS staff. The accommodation will enable the delivery of a high-quality curriculum and a greater offer of interventions both for PRU pupils and those on EOTAS.	There are associated costs for the refurbishment. Time scale of completing the work.	It is recommended that this option is progressed.

6. EVALUATION CRITERIA

- 6.1 This proposal needs to adequately meet the needs of a dynamic service within a finite cost envelope.

6.2 The options in the table above were judged in terms of their suitability, feasibility and acceptability. Given the issues faced by this statutory service the recommendation scores highly against these three criteria.

7. REASONS:

7.1 The benefits of bringing the South Monmouthshire PRU onto a more appropriately sized, permanent site would eliminate the need to maintain temporary, unsuitable accommodation at both Hanbury House and Caerwent Village Hall as a means of meeting the needs of more than one group of pupils.

7.2 The new facility would enable staff in the south of the county to be able to work more closely as a team, to support each other and therefore offer a more consistent service. Currently the Coordinator and two Assistant Coordinators, who make up the Leadership of the PRS, are split across the three separate sites to enable the correct levels of support needed. This relocation would mean that the leadership capacity would not be so stretched. The EOTAS tutors could use the office space as a basis for planning, preparation, and the delivery of online lessons.

7.3 The location of Hanbury House on a busy high street in a town centre, with no safe drop off points for pupils or parking for staff/visitors. The accommodation is on the first floor, there is no access to outside space for learning or pupil breaks. Safeguarding is challenging due to poor design, and this poses a risk. Pupils lack suitable space for de-escalation during crisis and frequently leave site without permission if distressed. The lack of outdoor space and limited teaching spaces is inadequate for the current (and future) pupils with complex needs. PRS staff often contact Police as pupils abscond when they could be monitored at distance if there was suitable outdoor space.

7.4 The PRS requires a permanent and dedicated high quality environment that is conducive to the needs of the current PRU population. This population require teaching spaces, inside and outside, that enable the full benefits of the new Curriculum for Wales (CfW) to be realised, where children/young people can be inspired and motivated to engage in meaningful and purposeful learning experiences. This includes opportunities to engage with science, food technology, physical education, and digitally based learning experiences alongside the more traditional curriculum elements. The risk of not being able to deliver the CfW risks a negative outcome of any inspection from Estyn. Monmouthshire PRS were last inspected in 2018 with a successful re-visit in December 2019.

- 7.5 The complexity of needs and associated vulnerability of pupils on the PRS role is well understood as is the overrepresentation of pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM), Children who are Looked After (CLA) and those who have experienced developmental/ relational trauma. Subsequently a high level of multi-agency, collaborative and person-centred work is required to ensure these pupils get the best chance to reengage with educational opportunities at a level and a pace conducive to their needs. A building that can provide space that is flexible enough to nurture, support and educate these pupils, and that supports emotionally attuned adults to work alongside them, is essential. These pupils require daily opportunities, both planned and responsive, to receive and engage with, interventions aimed at developing their emotional, mental health and wellbeing needs, as well as in many cases, to address their Additional Learning Needs (ALN).
- 7.7 The PRS currently run regular social, 'health and wellbeing' groups for their EOTAS pupils, who are able or willing to participate, many have autism and/ high levels of anxiety. The relocation of the PRU would allow such groups to happen on a dedicated and familiar site and could add further richness and scope to the current limited offer for pupils receiving EOTAS provision.
- 7.8 We are working to develop a partnership with Mon Life, to provide a sustainable model of alternative/ complementary provision for pupils accessing PRS, including those in the PRU, as well as some who receive EOTAS Medical or EOTAS ALN Bespoke provision. Having a base, with outside space, could provide a safe, additional opportunities for some of these pupils to work in partnership with the Mon Life team in the future, for example completing forest school and outdoor education learning experiences.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

The cost of refurbishing the building is £1.2m. The Children and Young People Directorate have identified £500k toward these costs from Education Capital Maintenance Grant, and this project falls within the terms and conditions.

To the extent that the remaining £700k cannot be met from other identified Education capital grant funding, a maximum of £700k will be funded via prudential borrowing over a 30-year period giving an indicative repayment of £47,591 per annum that will be met from the PRS budget.

9. CONSULTEES:

Children and Young People's Directorate Management Team (DMT).
Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

11. AUTHOR:

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