

Matter which the Chairman has decided is urgent by need of updating Members on the current position of St Athan Primary School following a major incident (fire).

Meeting of:	Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 03 March 2025
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Learning and Culture
Report Title:	Update on St Athan Primary School
Purpose of Report:	To update Members on the school’s recovery following damage to the site
Report Owner:	Liz Jones, Director of Learning & Skills
Responsible Officer:	Trevor Baker, Head of Strategy, Community Learning & Resources
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Councillor Rhiannon Birch, Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language Lisa Lewis, Operational Manager, Strategy & Resources Lorna Cross, Operational Manager, Property Management Team
Policy Framework:	The recommendations of this report are within existing policy framework and budget
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On 12 February, a fire broke out at St Athan Primary School during the school day above the ICT suite. • All Health & Safety procedures were in place and followed. • School based staff, under the leadership of the Acting Headteacher, were admirable in their response, evacuating all staff and pupil in under 2 minutes. There were no injuries. • South Wales Fire and Rescue Service (SWFRS) responded to the site immediately and contained the fire to a single block. • Remote learning protocols were put in motion to support pupils at home while the damage was assessed and recovery plans put into action to ensure a safe return to school. • A support hub was established at St Athan Community Library for access to school meals, ICT and family engagement with school staff/support officers. Support from the local community, council officers, partner organisations and Welsh Government has been extremely helpful and to the benefit of our pupils and staff. • The school will be reopening from 6 March to all staff and pupils. 	

Recommendations

1. Members note the actions taken in response to the incident at St Athan Primary School, and acknowledge the efforts and commitment of all those involved, in ensuring that the difficult and challenging situation and aftermath was dealt with effectively and efficiently.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. Members are aware of the actions taken by the school and the Local Authority to ensure continuity of learning and welcome pupils back to a safe learning environment.

1. Background

- 1.1 St Athan Primary School is located in the village of St Athan. It provides English-medium education to 201 pupils on roll. 25.2% of learners are eFSM, and 6% are identified as having additional learning needs.
- 1.2 The school has been under the leadership of an Acting Headteacher since September 2023, with the substantive headteacher on secondment to the CSCJES 4 days per week.
- 1.3 The school building is currently subject to phase 2 of a roofing renewal and associated works programme to address issues identified by the building's condition survey, conducted in January 2022.
- 1.4 On the morning of 12 February, a fire broke out above the ICT block at the south end of the school, causing significant damage to immediate areas. 2 classrooms and two computer areas were destroyed, alongside storage areas and a toilet area. Water damage to the Juniors' hall adjacent to the damaged block will require remedial works to the wood flooring.
- 1.5 The school took immediate action in evacuating pupils and staff. No injuries were sustained. SWFRS attended the site immediately and contained the fire to a single block. Officers from across the Council's services attended the site immediately to provide support and assist in relief efforts.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 Following the incident, the school closed, and all families were written to stating the closure would remain in place to assess the damage until after the half-term break.
- 2.2 A hub was established at the St Athan Community Library, where families could access school meal provision, collect belongings and access teaching

materials/technology to support remote learning. Teachers were available to support learners.

- 2.3** The Schools' PTA organised activities for pupil to meet outside of school.
- 2.4** The Council's Learning & Skills Educational Psychology service were dispatched to support staff and vulnerable learners.
- 2.5** There has been an outpouring of support from community organisations offering teaching materials, fundraising, alternative provision, school meals, furniture and activities for children. This support has had a significant positive impact on those affected and truly represents the best in the community.
- 2.6** Several visits to site have been held with contractors, property teams, loss adjusters Health & Safety, building control and ICT teams. Working alongside the school leadership team, plans were developed to make the site safe to welcome back pupils after half term.
- 2.7** A temporary wall will be erected in the Juniors' hall to cordon off the damaged block and make it inaccessible/viewable to pupils. It is anticipated that following the SWFRS forensic investigation, this area will be demolished.
- 2.8** The wooden flooring in the Juniors' hall adjacent to the damaged block suffered significant water damage, and the floor will need to be replaced. This will take several weeks due to new screed having to be laid and dried, and therefore the Juniors' hall will not be accessible until these works are completed.
- 2.9** The school will be using its infant's hall to accommodate mealtime provision for all pupils, on a staggered basis.
- 2.10** Rooms not currently in use as classrooms will be redesignated to accommodate displaced pupil from those classrooms destroyed in the fire. There is sufficient room to comfortably accommodate all pupils onsite, including those with additional learning needs. A deep clean will be conducted for areas affected by the smell of the fire.
- 2.11** A welfare room is being erected onsite for staff to use, alongside additional storage provision.
- 2.12** During the week commencing 24 February, the Council's Operational Manager, Strategy & Resources, is coordinating efforts to reconfigure classrooms within the school and arranging replacement furniture. We recognise the need for school-based staff to have a break for half term especially given the circumstances. Officers continue to liaise with the Acting Headteacher.
- 2.13** Correspondence has been sent to parents welcoming pupils back to school on 6th March. This will allow sufficient time over the half term to complete the immediate works in securing the site, configuring classrooms, and restoring internet connectivity to the site.
- 2.14** The school has an INSET day on 3 March, and two additional days have been provided for staff to ensure their classrooms are ready to welcome back pupils on 6 March, with a seamless transition.
- 2.15** Breakfast club will resume onsite from 10 March.

- 2.16** At this stage we are awaiting the outcome of the forensic investigation from SWFRS as to the cause of the fire, and no demolition can happen onsite until this work is completed. It is anticipated this will conclude in early March.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (“the 2015 Act”) requires the Council to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities, and each other and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.
- 3.2** The school and Council remain committed to ensuring the site is brought back into full use as soon as possible.
- 3.3** The school has remained committed to prioritising the needs of its learners and their wellbeing throughout this challenging period, and has the full support of the Local Authority, and its available resources.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1** There are no climate change or nature implications associated with this update report.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1** The Local Authority is awaiting details from its insurers as to the financial considerations regarding the losses suffered.
- 5.2** To mitigate any delay, the Local Authority is drawing down on its insurance reserve to enable remedial and priority works in order to welcome back pupils at the earliest opportunity.
- 5.3** Overall figures on the costs associated with the damage are not yet available and will subject to the loss adjusters report.

Employment

- 5.4** There are no employment implications associated with this update report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

5.5 The Council is currently liaising with the Authority's insurers to progress with the loss adjustment process.

6. Background Papers

None