

CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Council Chamber - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present:

1st October ,2014

Chairman: Councillor D.W.Davies

Vice Chairman: Councillor A.Jenkins

Councillors: Mrs P.Bebell, A.Carter, M.Harvey, Mrs.L.H.James, A.Llewelyn, A.R.Lockyer, Mrs.K.Pearson, L.M.Purcell, J.Warman, I.D.Williams and Mrs.A.Wingrave

Officers In Attendance S.Phillips, H.Jenkins, A.Evans, N.Jarman, G.Nutt, D.Michael, Mrs.K.Jones, R.Gordon, Crowhurst and Mrs.A.Manchipp

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors A.H.Thomas, M.L.James, E.V.Latham, Mrs.S.Miller, P.A.Rees, P.D.Richards, J.Rogers, A.J.Taylor and A.N.Woolcock

Invited Members: Councillors M.Ellis and Mrs.L.G.Williams

1. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Members made declarations of interest at the commencement of the meeting in relation to the report of the Head of Resources and Commissioning re the Strategic School Improvement Programme as they were governors at the schools identified hereunder and confirmed their dispensations to both speak and vote thereon:-

Councillor Mrs.P.Bebell

Crymlyn Primary School and
Coedffranc Primary School

Councillor A.Carter

Crynallt Primary School and Cefn
Saeson Comprehensive School

Councillor D.W.Davies	Chairman of Ynysfach Primary School and Llangatwg Community School
Councillor M.Ellis	Tonmawr Primary School and Pontrhydyfen Primary School
Councillor M.Harvey	Chairman of Neath Abbey Infants School
Councillor Mrs.L.H.James	St Therese's Catholic Primary School and Awel Y Mor Primary School
Councillor M.L.James	Llangwig Primary School and YGG Pontardawe
Councillor A.Jenkins	Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School and Gnoll Primary School
Councillor E.V.Latham	Tywyn Primary School, Traethmelyn Primary School and Ysgol Newydd (Bae Baglan) Temporary Governor
Councillor A.Llewelyn	YGG Y Wern and Ysgol Gyfun Ystalyfera
Councillor A.Lockyer	YGG Castell-nedd
Councillor Mrs.S.Miller	Melin Infant School and Melin Junior School
Councillor Mrs.K.Pearson	Langatwg Community School and Creunant Primary School
Councillor Mrs.S.M.Penry	Cwrt Sart Community Comprehensive School and Melin Junior School
Councillor L.M.Purcell	Rhydyfro Primary School and Cwmtawe Community School

Councillor P.A.Rees	Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School and Crynallt Primary School
Councillor P.D.Richards	Baglan Primary School and Vice Chairman of Blaenbaglan Primary School
Councillor J.Rogers	Chairman of Eastern Primary School and Groes Primary School
Councillor A.J.Taylor	Eastern Primary School
Councillor J.Warman	Crynallt Primary School and Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School
Councillor I.D.Williams	Chairman of Cwmafan Infant School and Cwmafan Junior School
Councillor Mrs.L.G.Williams	Chairman of YGG Cwmgors and YGG Gwaun Cae Gurwen
Councillor Mrs.A.Wingrave	Catwg Primary School and Coedffranc Primary School
Councillor A.N.Woolcock	Chairman of Tairgwaith Primary School

In addition the following Members made declarations of interest at the commencement of the meeting in relation to the report of the Head of Resources and Commissioning re the Strategic School Improvement Programme as specified hereunder :-

Councillor D.W.Davies	As a family member works at Tonmawr Primary School
Councillor A.Llewelyn	As he is a parent of a child attending Ysgol Gyfyn Ystalyfera

In addition Councillor M.Harvey made a declaration of interest at the commencement of the meeting in relation to the report of the Corporate Directors' Group re Budget Strategy for 2015/16 (and beyond) regarding CCTV as he work for the South Wales Police Force.

2. PRE SCRUTINY

The Committee scrutinised the following:-

Cabinet Proposals:

(i) Budget Strategy for 2015/16 (and beyond)

The Committee considered the comprehensive report of the Corporate Directors' Group on the Budget Strategy for 2015/16 (and beyond), wherein it was noted that all proposals contained in the circulated report were requesting authority to consult.

The Chief Executive advised Members that the Welsh Government had announced its Draft Budget on 30th September and Officers would analyse its implications in relation to Tables 3 and 4 of the circulated report. Additionally Members noted that the provisional budget in relation to Neath Port Talbot would be announced on 8th October and Members would be advised of the actual savings required thereafter.

During the discussions the following points/issues were raised:-

- That the public should be made aware of the proposals and invited to put forward alternative proposals, as appropriate;
- The need to ensure, where possible, equality of provision across the County Borough;
- Ensure that valley areas experience the same quality of life and wellbeing as other areas.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by Cabinet.

(ii) Strategic School Improvement Programme – Consultation on Proposals to Close Five Small Primary Schools

Committee received the report in relation to the above and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning stressed that the proposals were not budget saving proposals, but were proposals to improve the education provision and experience within the County Borough and to deliver education more efficiently. Savings realised as a result of the programme would be reinvested into the school stock. Members were reminded of a Welsh

Government's definition of a small school which was of less than 90 pupils, while a secondary school was less than 600 pupils.

The report requested authority to consult on the proposals, contained in the circulated report only. Should the proposals be approved, following the consultation period, all the schools referred to would close on 31st August 2015.

Members then made to following points, in relation to the schools identified for possible closure, as specified hereunder:-

Bryn Primary School

- Performance of Cwmafan Primary school would be looked;
- Reassurance was sought that the £1.2m outstanding maintenance in Cwmafan Primary School would be carried out, and Members were advised that with less schools, maintenance issues would reduce;
- The safety of the young children accessing the school, Officers confirmed that a Learner Travel Impact Assessment would be undertaken and that assistance with transport would be made available to pupils living 2 miles or more from Cwmafan or where the route to school was assessed to be unsuitable;
- Concern was expressed that the Strategic School Improvement Programme was being carried out on a piecemeal basis and was based on the retirement of Headteachers. Officers advised that this was not the case but was carried out in a strategic way. The current programme responded to demographic change and the condition of the school fabric, etc. The Welsh Government's definition of a small school was also used as an indicator but was not as a trigger in this process. In addition the Authority would not have the capacity to carry out the programme on a County wide basis.
- Was it the Authority's Policy to close all small primary schools? Officers advise that school reorganisation was an ongoing programme with the viability of each school being regularly reviewed.
- Were the Authority's decisions subject to Ministerial overview? Officers responded that the decisions in relation to the Strategic School Improvement Programme rests with the Authority's Cabinet, with the exception of the 6th Form provision which is with Welsh Government.
- Did the 2 mile limit apply to both infant and junior school provision? Officers confirmed this to be the case.

Clun Primary School

- Members requested detail of the school transport costs, particularly as the majority of pupil were for Clun or Melyncourt;
- The Ward Member requested that the concerns of the Chairman of Govenors at Clun Primary School be taken into account during the consultation period – this was confirmed by Officers;
- Would the maintenance backlog be addressed? Members were advised that with less schools, maintenance issues would reduce;
- An updated condition survey was also requested – Officers confirmed that condition surveys were being updated as part of the consultation process;
- Members requested that any costs including redundancies and additional transport be considered;
- Committee was advised that in relation to school transport costs, Learner Travel Impact Assessments would be carried out in relation to all proposals contained in the circulated report;
- Members requested that further scrutiny be undertaken in relation to the discrepancies in the findings of Estyn inspections (carried out on a six yearly cycle) and the Authority’s own inspections (carried out annually). Officers advised that Estyn was satisfied with the Authority’s inspections.

Pontrhydyfen Primary School

- Members queried the school transport issue and were given assurances that the Learner Travel Impact Assessment would be undertaken and that assessments would be carried out on a pupil by pupil basis;
- Some pupils had elected to attend a school outside their catchment area. Could the reason for this decision be ascertained during the consultation period – Officers reported that provisions allowed parental choice in respect of a school for their child and that there were a range of reasons why parents chose a school other than the designated catchment school;
- Concern was expressed that both Bryn Primary School and Pontrhydyfen Primary School would be accommodated on

the Cwmafan Primary School site – was there enough space/capacity? Officers confirmed that the site could accommodate both primary school pupils.

Tonmawr Primary School

(Councillor D.W.Davies reaffirmed his interest in this item and withdrew from the meeting for this item only – Councillor A.Jenkins took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting).

- Concern was expressed regarding the health, safety and wellbeing of pupils as the area around Crynallt Primary School was very busy due to high volumes of traffic. Perhaps Option 2 re Federation could be considered? Officers confirmed that all comments would be considered during the consultation period;
- In relation to the Early Years Assessment Centre, should the preferred proposal be implemented, this would need to be relocated. Would the areas in which the service users lived be taken into account when determining an alternative site – Officers confirmed that this would be the case;
- Members noted that the overall costs associated with the school took into account the costs of the Assessment Centre, which would then impact on the total cost of the Primary School;
- Members questioned the need to close Tonmawr Primary school in view of its excellent performance.

YGG Cwmgors

- Members questioned whether, as pupil numbers are forecast to increase, an alternative to the proposed closure be explored, with federation being the preferred option by the Ward Member – Officers confirmed that this would be taken into account as part of the consultation process;

Members' attention was drawn to the Equality Impact Assessments which were attached to the circulated report at Appendix A.

Following scrutiny the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by Cabinet

CHAIRMAN

