

POLICY AND RESOURCES/ CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Council Chamber - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present:

4 October, 2017

Chairman: Councillor A.N.Woolcock

Vice Chairman: Councillor S.Rahaman

Councillors: S.K.Hunt, H.N.James, A.Llewelyn, S.Miller,
J.D.Morgan, S.Paddison, S.M.Penry and
L.M.Purcell

Officers In Attendance S.Phillips, H.Jenkins, G.Nutt, A.Evans,
A.Thomas, D.Michael, R.Gordon, A.Manlipp
and Miss.C.Davies

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors R.G.Jones, A.J.Taylor, D.W.Davies,
E.V.Latham, A.R.Lockyer, P.A.Rees and
A.Wingrave

1. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Members made declarations of interest at the commencement of the meeting in relation to the Strategic School Improvement Programme: Proposed Projects for the Council's 21st Century Schools Capital Funding Programme - Band B (2019-2024):-

Councillor R.G.Jones As his daughter works in the education system, but has no interest in the proposals on the agenda

Councillor A.J.Taylor As he has children of school age who are not in the schools mentioned in the report

Councillor P.A.Rees As he is a Governor at Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School and confirmed

his dispensation to both speak and vote thereon

- Councillor A.R.Lockyer As he is a Governor at Gnoll Primary School and Castell Nedd Primary School and confirmed his dispensation to both speak and vote thereon
- Councillor S.Rahaman As both his children attend schools in the Neath Port Talbot education system, but not the schools mentioned in the report.
- Councillor L.Purcell As she is a Governor of Rhydyfro Primary School and Cwmtawe and confirmed her dispensation to both speak and vote thereon.
- Councillor S.Miller As she is a Governor at Melin Primary School and confirmed her dispensation to both speak and vote thereon. She also has grandchildren in the schools system but has no direct interest in the schools referred to in the report.
- Councillor A.Llewelyn As he is a Governor at Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera Bro Dur and a parent of a child at that school. In addition his wife works as a teacher with the Authority and confirmed his dispensation to speak but not vote.
- Councillor S.K.Hunt As his daughter works at Castell Nedd Welsh School Neath.
- Councillor H.N.James As he is the Chair of Governors at Llansawel Primary School, Briton Ferry, a Member of the Shadow Governing Body for Ysgol Newydd Gymraeg, Sandfields, and a Governor at Ysgol Newydd, Briton Ferry and confirmed his dispensation to both speak and vote thereon.

Councillor S.M.Penry

As she is a Governor at Cefn Saeson and confirmed her dispensation to both speak and vote thereon.

2. CITY DEAL

Members of the Regeneration and Sustainable Development Scrutiny Committee had been invited to attend the Committee for this item.

The Chief Executive gave the Scrutiny Committee an overview of his report in relation to the City Deal. Members noted that this would be a huge commitment on the Authority and that, while the Authority was not averse to risk taking, this had to be managed carefully.

The Chief Executive advised that he had, today, received a letter from the Future Generations Commissioner, supporting the views contained in the report in relation to sustainability. A further meeting had been arranged tomorrow in relation to the governance of the City Deal and also next week, in Cardiff.

A further report would be presented to Members once the outstanding matters had been resolved.

The following points were then raised:-

- There was support for the views contained in the circulated report, in particular including the Regeneration and Sustainable Development Scrutiny Committee going forward;
- Although there were schemes within the overall plan for all of the local Authority areas, the main focus was on Swansea as the regional capital and many of the Neath Port Talbot residents worked in Swansea.
- Although there was a complex element of risk associated with the City Deal, there was a potential for significant benefits.
- As there was little for the valley areas, how much room was there for negotiation of the schemes? The Chief Executive advised that there was still a potential to change some of the 11 projects identified, although such projects as the Digital Infrastructure was seen as benefitting the Valley areas by increasing connectivity.
- Was there a possibility of the Swansea Bay Metro including the valleys to aid work/training opportunities? Also would there be a possibility of joining both the Cardiff and the Swansea Metro's in order to make the service more inclusive? Members

attention was drawn to the fact the Swansea Bay Metro would bypass Neath – was this acceptable?

- Members were supportive that the report be referred to the Regeneration and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee for discussion, although the final decision would be taken by Cabinet.
- Members question the timescale around agreeing the Joint Working Arrangement and also the setting up of the Joint Committee and were advised that it was hoped to have set them up before Christmas. It was important to finalise the arrangements prior to the entering into the agreement and to agree on governance arrangements. Members noted that until these had been agreed it would not be possible to approve any of the 11 projects.
- The budget setting for the Authority would be finalised in the New Year, and therefore there was a need to complete negotiations in order to feed into the budget process. Since the initial discussions Members acknowledged that such things as the issues around Pantteg, in the Swansea Valley, had emerged.
- In relation to the ABMU, Members were concerned at the ability to undertake the ARCH Project, due to its financial difficulties. The Chief Executive confirmed that there had been no progress on the project.
- Members expressed concern as to whether the City Deal would come to fruition as there were comparisons with the Lagoon. Why had the Lagoon not progressed? This was as the Prime Minister had not yet signed the paperwork.
- Members felt that perhaps Joint Scrutiny should be in place now, in order to scrutinise the setting up of the scheme. The Chief Executive advised that it would be necessary to establish the Joint Working Agreement first and that thereafter a Scrutiny Committee be established to mirror it.
- Members asked how the establishment of the UK Austerity Fund following Britain's exit from the European Union would affect the Authority and were advised that this was unknown at present, however the Authority had a good track record with realising funds through EU grants and it was hoped that this would continue
- Members noted that Welsh Government was of the view that Councils should be ambitious and take risks in order the realise funding through the City Deal, however Members felt that the Authority would be taking all the risk at this point as the details were not yet finalised.

- Members expressed disappointment in that the UK Government had taken a u turn in extending the electrification of the railway to Swansea.

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

3. **STRATEGIC SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT CAPITAL FUNDING PROGRAMME BAND B (2019-2024)**

Members received the report of the Head of Transformation in relation to the above. Members were asked to note that the report was not asking Members to agree the particular proposals contained in the report, which, if funding was approved, would come before the Education, Skills and Leisure Scrutiny Committee/Cabinet Board for decision, on a piecemeal basis and would be subject to the necessary consultation. The Welsh Government had only asked for expressions of interest at this point in time. Members also noted that the Welsh Government had indicated that the Band B proposals may extend into 2026.

Members then raised the following:-

- That it would have been of benefit if Officers of the Education Directorate had discussed the contents of the report with the Head Teachers and Governors of the schools mentioned in the report – as had been done in relation to Band A. Members were disappointed that the first schools knew was a letter received on 29 September 2017.
- Members highlighted the importance of not only improving teaching conditions but also the sporting facilities, also developing community partnerships in this regard, where possible.
- Concern was expressed at the amount of money to be spent on Welsh medium education, and Members were advised that in the region of £42m would be spent in the 21st Century Schools improvement programme. As a result of improvements in the South of the County Borough, pupils who currently attend school in the North would relocate to schools closer to where they lived. This would result in the re modelling of the provision. In addition it was confirmed that there was potential for the new school in Coed Darcy to be a Welsh medium provision.

- The local Member expressed concern at the rationale for the proposals in relation to Cwmtawe, as it was both successful and oversubscribed. It was also felt that the proposals in the report had affected the morale of staff and would have a detrimental effect on recruitment. In addition the vehicular access was at present an issue. Officers responded and advised that there were a number of 3-16 models for consideration in relation to the future of Cwmtawe and that no decision would be made in relation thereto at today's meeting.
- Members supported the proposal to upgrade a second tranche of schools, however concern was expressed in using the Mutual Investment Model to fund part of the proposals as it was too similar to Private Finance Initiatives (PFI's) which had proved to be problematic.
- Members also asked whether there was a further list of schools should any of the schools mentioned in the report not be progressed. Officers confirmed that there was as some schools had contacted the Directorate and were unhappy at not being included in Band B.
- The Director of Finance and Corporate Services confirmed that finances were available to progress the schemes, some as part of a 106 Agreement, but reiterated that today's report was not asking for Cabinet to commit the resources.

(At this point in the meeting Councillor L. Purcell disclosed an interest as she works at Rhydyfro Primary School as a volunteer and took no further part in the discussions or voting on the report as it referred to Rhydyfro Primary School).

- The relevant Cabinet Member reiterated that over the last 7 years the Authority had invested £42m in Welsh medium education and again stressed that a decision in relation to each school, contained in the report, would be dealt with on an individual basis. The report had been produced as a result of Welsh Government asking for expressions of interest in the next round of 21st Century School funding.

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

CHAIRMAN