

**Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the Cabinet / Education Skills and Culture Scrutiny Committees**

21 October 2020

Via Microsoft Teams

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<b>Chairperson:</b>	<b>Councillor S.Reynolds</b>
<b>Vice Chairperson:</b>	<b>Councillor M.Harvey</b>
<b>Councillors:</b>	M.Crowley, S.E.Freeguard, J.Hale, S.Harris, M.Harvey, N.T.Hunt, S.K.Hunt, J.Jones, D.Keogh, A.Llewelyn, S.Miller, R.Mizen, J.D.Morgan, S.Paddison, S.M.Penry, R.Phillips, L.M.Purcell, S.Rahaman, S.Renkes, S.H.Reynolds, A.J.Richards, D.Whitelock, R.W.Wood and A.N.Woolcock
<b>Co-opted Voting Members:</b>	A. Amor, M.Caddick and L.Newman
<b>Officers In Attendance:</b>	R.Bowen, R.Crowhurst, P.Curnow, S.Curran, C.Davies, A.Evans, C.Griffiths, A.Jarrett, H.Jenkins, K.Jones, J.Merrifield, S.Phillips, C.Plowman, A.Thomas and J.Woodman-Ralph
<b>Cabinet Invitees:</b>	Councillors C.Clement-Williams, R.Davies, D.Jones, L.Jones, R.G.Jones, E.V.Latham, A.R.Lockyer, P.A.Rees and P.D.Richards

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1. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRPERSON AND VICE CHAIRPERSON**

It was agreed that Councillor S.Reynolds be appointed Chairperson and that Councillor M.Harvey be appointed Vice Chairperson for this joint meeting.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

The following Members made a declaration of interest at the commencement of the meeting:

- A.Llewelyn                      Re: Report of the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning on the Strategic School Improvement Programme, Proposal to establish an English medium 3 - 11 school to replace, Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools as his wife is a teacher at Cwmtawe Community School and is a Governor at Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera Bro Dur but has dispensation to speak and vote.
- L.Purcell                         Re: Report of the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning on the Strategic School Improvement Programme, Proposal to establish an English medium 3 - 11 school to replace, Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools as she is a Governor at Rhydyfro Primary School and Cwmtawe Community School but has dispensation to speak and vote.
- R.Davies                         Re: Report of the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning on the Strategic School Improvement Programme, Proposal to establish an English medium 3 - 11 school to replace, Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools as she is a Governor at Godre'rgraig Primary School and Ysgol Gyfun Ystalyfera.
- R.Phillips                        Re: Report of the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning on the Strategic School Improvement Programme, Proposal to establish an English medium 3 - 11 school to replace, Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools as she is a Governor at Ysgol Gynradd

Gymraeg Trebannws and Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Pontardawe but has dispensation to speak and vote.

A.Amor

Re: Report of the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning on the Strategic School Improvement Programme, Proposal to establish an English medium 3 - 11 school to replace, Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig Primary Schools as he is a Governor at Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera Bro Dur but has dispensation to speak and vote.

3. **STRATEGIC SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME - PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH AN ENGLISH MEDIUM 3 - 11 SCHOOL TO REPLACE, ALLTWEN, GODRE'RGRAIG AND LLANGIWG PRIMARY SCHOOLS. (ENCLOSED WITHIN CABINET PAPERS)**

The Strategic School Improvement Programme was presented to Members, which subject to Cabinet approval, would consult on a proposal to establish an English-medium school for 3-11 year olds to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig Primary Schools; the proposed school would include a specialist learning support centre and would be in a new build premises to accommodate pupils from the current catchment areas of the three mentioned primary schools, all of which would close on 31st August 2024. Officers explained that one of the main purposes of the consultation was to obtain the comments and concerns of the stakeholders associated with those schools, in order to take forward the best possible solution in the valley areas.

It was proposed that the new school would be built on land in Council ownership at Parc Ynysderw Pontardawe and it would form part of the learning, health and wellbeing community campus made up of Cwmtawe Community School and Pontardawe Leisure Centre.

Officers emphasised that the staff, pupils and governors of Cwmtawe Community School were not materially involved in this proposal. It was mentioned in the report that previously Neath Port Talbot Council's 21st Century Schools Band B Strategic Outline Plan submitted a proposal to Welsh Government for a new build middle

school for 3-16 year olds; however, following informal discussions with stakeholders, including governors and all the schools in the valley, there was a wide spread agreement that a new primary school was needed and there was no support for a 3-16 model. It was therefore decided that the scheme should be amended to a 3-11 primary school model.

A discussion took place in relation to the finer details of the school, which included the following:

- It was stated that the proposed school would accommodate 630 full time primary pupils and 140 part time nursery pupils; this would be the largest primary school in Neath Port Talbot;
- Officers mentioned that the backlog maintenance elements that would be eradicated included over £2million for removal of the primary schools and over £1.2million associated with the swimming pool;
- The case for the Learning Support Centre (LSC) was detailed to be created following the completion of reviews on the number and type of planned places and assessment provision across Neath Port Talbot; it was identified that there was a need for extra places in the areas of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD). It was proposed that the new school included a LSC for up to 16 primary aged pupils with a statement of ASD;
- The report highlighted that there would be a new swimming pool established and that it would replace the existing Pontardawe Swimming Pool; it was expressed to Welsh Government that the new pool would provide an additional facility alongside the leisure centre, revitalising and increasing the health and well-being facilities in the Swansea Valley area;
- In relation to transport, it was noted that most pupils associated with the proposal lived within 2 miles of the new site and those who lived more than 2 miles away from the school, would be eligible for transportation support as stated within the Home to School Transport Policy;
- It was explained that School Governors would be affected by the proposal, with the closure of three schools; a shadowing governing body would need to be established, around 18 months before the start of the new school, and it would have many important responsibilities which would include the

appointment of the Head Teacher. Following this, the governing body and the assigned Head Teacher would then need to create a staffing structure.

The consultation period was stated to begin on 3 November 2020 and last until 5 January 2021; this was noted to be three weeks longer than required. Officers explained that they were proposing to extend the consultation to provide public with the extra time due to how the pandemic had affected usual procedures and due to the fact that the Christmas period was included within the dates.

Members asked if Officers could comment on the current numbers of the primary schools compared with the potential capacity of the new school, and if these numbers indicated that further schools may close in the future to reach the capacity that was indicated within the circulated report. Officers expressed that dealing with the numbers for new schools was a difficult process and included taking a number of points into consideration:

- Officers were aware of the number of pupils that were in the schools currently, and over the next few years anticipated that those numbers would go down slightly. It was noted that when planning a new school, all pupils who lived within the catchment area of the three schools needed to be taken into consideration and there were currently around 240 pupils who went to other schools both inside and outside of the County Borough; under the Admissions Policy, they all could claim a place in the new school;
- Members were informed that when planning a new school, Officers were required to look at the Local Development Plan (LDP) and consider the future housing developments; the LDP currently detailed that over the next 5-6 years there were 700 units planned for the area in discussion which would generate a number of additional pupils;
- The three schools involved in the proposal were mentioned to be either side of the valley, between Rhos and Rhyd-Y-Fro; there was spare capacity in both of these primary schools, and therefore if the number of pupils exceeds the capacity of the new school, there would be space for them in Rhos Primary School or Rhyd-Y-Fro Primary School. It was added that Officers were required to provide an education in the greater area, so not including these two primary schools in the proposal provided flexibility going forward in relation to school numbers.

The reasons highlighted explained why the numbers for the new school appeared to be much larger than the number of pupils currently in the schools and the pupil projections; Officers had to ensure they were future proofing Neath Port Talbot in being able to provide an education for pupils within the County Borough going forward, taking into account current knowledge and the LDP.

Members queried what the capital and revenue funding arrangements were for the swimming pool element of the proposal. It was stated that whilst this proposal was focused on the new school, the introduction of the swimming pool element allowed Members to consider all factors from a funding point of view; the total funding package amounted to around £22.5million and Welsh Government would be funding 65% of the total amount. Officers highlighted that the swimming pool added around £8million onto the development and 65% of the £8million was being picked up under the 21<sup>st</sup> century schools funding mechanism, as it would have over 2,000 pupils benefitting from the health and wellbeing perspective. Members were informed that the swimming pool formed part of the capital element of the proposal and from a funding and capital point of view, it was all one scheme; revenue was slightly different as currently Celtic Leisure were running the County Boroughs leisure facilities. It was added that the swimming pool would be managed by the leisure operator and the costs of running the pool would be managed by the leisure budget. Some of the efficiencies mentioned that had been identified by having both facilities on the same site included that only one reception area/receptionist would be needed instead of two and it would provide direct access for pupils at multiple schools.

Following on from the discussion, Members then asked if the funding balance, and the feasibility of it, would depend on the whole package going through; if one of the schools were to drop out for example, would this then affect the funding. Officers stated that significant changes to the business case, such as a school dropping out, would result in having to put forward a new business case to Welsh Government; however the case would then be weakened as there would be less pupils obtaining direct access to the benefits described and it would be less likely that Welsh Government would approve the funding.

Due to the fact that Alltwen had a high occupancy rate, Members asked for further information in relation to the response from the informal consultations. Officers explained that in general terms, those

who were involved in the informal consultation were in agreement that a new primary school was needed for the valley and had a similar view point that a 3-16 school was not needed; those who took part in the discussion were concerned that the addition of four schools in the area would be too many, therefore were in support of the type of proposal that was included within the report. In regards to Alltwen Primary School, it was noted to have had very significant building issues and a lot of temporary accommodation; it was not a site that would be easy to develop and did not have a large number of pupils compared to newer primary schools.

It was asked what consideration had been given so far to the Welsh Language impact. Officers explained that, subject to Cabinet approval, the next stage would be to complete a full impact assessment which would include the Welsh Language impact, so that if and when the time comes for Members to make a decision in regards to the proposal, the full details and facts would be available.

The working title of the school was detailed to be "Ysgol Newydd Swansea Valley"; Members highlighted that this title did not make sense and asked if it could be changed, to which Officers noted and confirmed this.

Godre'rgraig was noted to have had a very high percentage of pupils from the catchment area, reflecting that it was a village/community school; the transfer to Pontardawe was intended to be temporary, therefore Members asked for an update on the status of mitigating the quarry spoil and/or establishing a new school for the community on an alternative site. It was stated that any proposal that would be brought forward as part of the consultation process would be given proper consideration and would be reported back to Members. Officers explained that although Godre'rgraig Primary School was currently in temporary accommodation, the school wasn't involved in the proposal due to that situation, and that it was a requirement to include this information in the report as it was a factor that was currently impacting Godre'rgraig. Members were informed that school re-organisation proposals were always brought forward based on the 4 principles (Educational Standards, Need for Places and Accessibility of Schools, Quality of Accommodation and Effective Financial Management) and from looking at those principles, the school was agreed to be suitable to consult with stakeholders around providing a 21<sup>st</sup> century education for the pupils. It was added that Godre'rgraig was included in the first proposal in 2015, as well as the

current proposal, therefore even if the school wasn't in temporary accommodation, it would still be included within the proposal.

Members raised concerns in relation to the public being able to respond to the consultation without having details in relation to the access road to the proposed new school; it was highlighted that the current road already had been assessed as having multiple issues with highway safety and there were a significant amount more pupils that would need to be transported via that road if the proposal were to be agreed. It was highlighted that issues raised around access would be a condition of planning; the Councils planning processes require a pre-application planning and a full planning process, both of which are very rigorous. Therefore, if the proposals were approved and moved to the stage of planning, those who had raised concerns, would receive full information on this matter.

Detailed within the circulated report it states that the School Travel Plan requires that all schools, together with the Council's Road Safety Team, were committed to improving road safety within the local community and raising awareness about travel issues; Members asked if Officers could confirm that the proposal satisfies those requirements. It was mentioned that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme, from a highways perspective, enabled a significant part of the budget to be set aside for highways improvement; planning approval would not be granted unless the traffic management arrangements in that area was significantly improved. It was added that the proposed site had a lot of land and space for factors such as, turning buses and staff parking, which would assist in accessibility. Officers were confident that if the proposal was to go-ahead, the current situation would be improved due to the requirements from the Councils Highways and Planning departments, as it had been a similar process for other new school developments in the County Borough.

Members highlighted that the report detailed concerns regarding the possible effect on nursery pupils, and asked how this would be addressed in the proposal. Officers confirmed that the concerns were raised during the informal discussions and that the consultation period would identify the extent of these issues; Officers would need to understand from this, how significant an issue it is for how many people in order to respond.

In relation to the preferred option six contained within the circulated report, which anticipated that 140 nursery pupils would be attending



the nursery, Members asked how confident Officers were that this many would attend; it was stated that given past experiences, Officers would be confident that the nursery would reach full capacity.

Contained within the circulated report Fields in Trust had stated that it was responsive to local change and flexible in its dealings with landowners and will be happy to consider a possible exchange of land to accommodate the new school; Members expressed their concern in relation to losing parts of the land which currently suited a range of activities including sports and a children's playground. Officers mentioned that the playing field permits were with the ground maintenance leasing arrangements that all of the Councils playing fields were under; the ground maintenance were responsible for issuing all games within the Neath and Swansea Valley area, and currently there wasn't an extensive use of the playing field at Parc Ynysderw. It was noted Officers had dealt with Fields in Trust many times and were looking at a range of options together, however weren't able to enter into any agreements just yet; discussions had taken place with both Fields in Trust and those who issue the permits regarding the fields.

Following this, Members were informed that there was a sum of money within the £23million budget to improve drainage on two of the pitches, to ensure those pitches were useable, meaning there was no loss of facility at Parc Ynysderw in terms of the demand. It was mentioned that there was also a sum of money for the acquisition of land should it need to be used in the future. Officers had future proofed the finances to keep Fields in Trust and playing facilities at Parc Ynysderw protected; whilst it was proposed to build a large school and swimming pool, Members were reassured that there would be no loss of amenity, including the children playground, instead it would be enhancing what was already there.

A discussion took place in relation to the details of the consultation period in which Members voiced some of their concerns with the process. Officers clarified that the process they were suggesting for the consultation exercise was slightly different to usual due to the pandemic, however the effort that would be involved in this would be no less rigorous. Subject to Cabinet approval, once the consultation period had ended it was noted that Officers would be reporting back to Members and asking them for one of three recommendations to be approved; continue with the current proposal, amend the proposal or decline the proposal altogether. It was highlighted that if someone was to bring forward an alternative proposal, which was different to

the eight included within the circulated report, Officers would take it into consideration and report to Members in full on its pros and cons.

Following on from this, Members queried if the date of the consultation period could be further extended. It was stated that the consultation dates had been extended by three weeks, but Officers suggested that an extra two weeks could be added to the timeframe; if Members agreed to this, the report would need to be amended.

Members asked if it was at any point proposed that the new school be a Welsh-medium school. It was explained that when considering a school re-organisation proposal, Officers had to identify how education was organised within the area; there were currently three primary schools within the Swansea Valley area that had a Welsh provision:

- Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera Bro Dur
- Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Pontardawe
- Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Trebannws.

It was highlighted that there was capacity within the primary area in each one of those schools to increase the Welsh-medium provision; work just recently concluded at Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Pontardawe in which £1.6million was spent on the school to increase the potential capacity. The standards of provision and capacity of those schools was noted to have been increased. Officers added that when they originally looked at the four principles and reviewed the arrangements in the valley, the criteria led them to the conclusion that an English-medium school was needed; as there was sufficient provision within the Swansea Valley for Welsh-medium education. Members were informed that the Council had to meet its 35% capital requirement of funding; the 35% was funded from efficiencies within the delegated schools budgets, and the savings and efficiencies created from closing the three schools detailed within the report, will enable the Council to fund the 35% element of the capital bill.

Detailed within the circulated report it stated that the Council was committed to supporting staff at risk of compulsory redundancy and had secured the support and goodwill of the teacher associations/trade unions and governing bodies across the Council, via an employers' pledge; Members asked who the employer was in this respect and asked for further information on the pledge. Officers confirmed that the employer was the Local Authority, however the responsibility was given to the governing body to deal with the

majority of decisions within the school including staffing. The pledge was noted to be established a number of years ago, in which all governing bodies were asked to sign up to so that if any members of staff would be affected by school re-organisation proposals, they would be given prior consideration; this had become a custom practice and the vast majority of schools within the County Borough had honoured the commitment of the pledge. It was added that it was a commitment by agreement and that there was no legal responsibility, however it was something that the family of schools had taken very seriously; so far there had not been any compulsory redundancies made.

The report mentioned that the new build facilities would be located 'close to' Cwmtawe Community School; Members asked for clarification on what was meant by 'close to' and where exactly the school and swimming pool would be located. Officers highlighted that they had been in some discussions with architects, however due to the early stages of the proposal there were still a lot of work that needed undertaking on this including capturing the finer details. It was confirmed that the new facilities were going to be adjacent to the Cwmtawe Community School; the placement would ensure that pupils from the secondary and primary school could make daily use of the leisure facilities with minimum disruption and distance as possible. It was added that from a planning and architecture point of view, there were all sorts of regulations that needed to be adhered to.

Members asked if Officers had been in contact with individuals such as the Police, highways and sustainable travel to discuss the matter of the access road. It was confirmed discussions had started with highways, who would be heavily involved in the process; this proposal provided an opportunity, with the funding, to improve the highway development which may not had been available otherwise.

In regards to the swimming pool, the report mentioned that the current pool was used by some schools in the area, but the scheme aimed to increase usage by schools and the wider community due to its core location; Members asked what evidence Officers had to support this and if there would be a hiatus between closing the current pool and opening the new pool. It was noted that Cwmtawe Community School did not use the current swimming pool due to transport costs, so already there would be 13,000 pupils who would immediately benefit from the new facilities; the intention was to close the old pool, and open the new pool the next following day to prevent loss of amenity for a period of time.

Members asked, should the preferred option for this consultation not be accepted, what would happen to all the plans for the funding. It was stated that Officers would need to start the process from the beginning and prepare a new business case to present to Welsh Government in terms of funding, as the preferred option (number six in the circulated report) was the proposal that Officers had secured funding for.

Officers were asked if they had considered the environmental aspect of the school as a lot more pupils would be travelling by bus or car to get to the site; it was stated that subject to cabinet approval, a full impact assessment of the biodiversity aspects would be carried out.

A formal additional recommendation, to the recommendations contained within the circulated report, was proposed and seconded:-

‘Prior to embarking on consultation, Officers investigate whether it was feasible for Godre'rgraig to retain a village primary school, at either its current site with appropriate investment or a new build site in the community, with a report being brought back to members for determination whether to include this as part of the consultation before the consultation is embarked on’

It was queried whether the detail of the formal amendment would in any way jeopardise the Welsh Government funding application and if it would affect the timescales of this work being carried out. Officers clarified that if any one of the three named schools were to decide to withdraw from the proposal, a new school re-organisation plan would need to be developed as well as a new case for funding; the certainty that Officers currently had in relation to the funding (65% of £23million from Welsh Government) would no longer be in place. It was highlighted that if anyone was to put the proposed amendment forward as part of the consultation exercise instead, Officers would carry out the work needed and report back to Members at the next stage, to prevent delays to the consultation.

Members asked if an additional new school was to be built in the area, as suggested in the proposed amendment, where would that funding come from; Welsh Government would need to review any potential business case, however from previous experience, Officers highlighted that it was unlikely that Welsh Government would provide 21<sup>st</sup> century funding to build a 200 place primary school.

A roll call was undertaken for the purposes of determining the vote; the amendment fell as a result of the roll call.

Members of the Scrutiny committee were in support in the extension of the consultation period by a further 2 weeks and that the appropriate parts of the report be amended to reflect the following:

- That the consultation starts on the 3 November 2020 and ends on the 19 January 2021, this includes the additional 2 weeks.
- That the Consultation report be published on the 26 February 2021.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the original proposals detailed within the circulate report, along with the amended consultation dates, and for them to be considered by Cabinet.

**Chairperson**