

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

(Via Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

16 June 2021

Chairperson: Councillor S.H. Reynolds

Vice Chairperson: Councillor S.Rahaman

Councillors: M.Crowley, S.E.Freeguard, W.F.Griffiths, J.Hale, S.Harris, N.T.Hunt, J.Jones, D.Keogh, S.A.Knoyle, A.Llewelyn, S.Miller, R.Mizen, S.Paddison, S.M.Penry, R.Phillips, M.Protheroe, L.M.Purcell, S.Rahaman, S.Renkes, S.H.Reynolds, A.J.Richards, M.Spooner, R.L.Taylor, D.Whitelock, R.W.Wood and A.N.Woolcock

Co-opted Voting Members: M.Caddick

Officers In Attendance C.Davies, C.Griffiths, A.Jarrett, H.Jenkins, K.Jones, N.Pearce and A.Thomas, R.Crowhurst, P.Curnow, R Bowen, J.Merrifield and J Woodman-Ralph.

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors: E.Latham, C. Clement-Williams, M.Harvey, D.Jones, A.Lockyer, P.Rees, P.Richards, A.Wingrave and L.Jones

1. Appointment of Chairperson and Vice Chairperson

It was agreed that Councillor S.Reynolds be appointed Chairperson and that Councillor S.Rahaman 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:

Cllr M Crowley	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as he is a Governor at Awel y Môr Primary School and Tywyn Primary School but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr W Griffiths	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as he is a Governor at Blaenhonddan Primary School and Waunceirch Primary School but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr S Harris	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as she is a Governor at Creunant Primary School but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr S Hunt	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as he is a Governor at Blaendulais Primary School and YGG Blaendulais but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr J Jones	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as she is a Governor at The Federated Primary Schools of the Upper Afan Valley but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr D Keogh	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium

		3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as he is a Governor at Ysgol Cwm Brombil but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr S Knogle	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as he is a Governor at YGG Cwm Nedd but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr A Llewelyn	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as he is a Governor at Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera-Bro Dur but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr S Miller	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as she is a Governor at Melin Primary School but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr R Mizzen	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as he is a Governor at Cwmafan Primary School and Ysgol Cwm Brombil but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr S Penry	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as she is a Governor at Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School and Melin Primary School but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr R Phillips	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme

		- Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as she is a Governor at YGG Pontardawe and YGG Trebannws but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr M Protheroe	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as he is a Governor at Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School and Melin Primary School but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr L Purcell	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as she is a Governor at Cwmtawe Community School and Rhydyfro Primary School but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr S Renkes	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as she is a Governor at Baglan Primary School and Blaenbaglan Primary School but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr S Reynolds	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as she is a Governor at YGG Gawun-Cae-Gurwen but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr R Taylor	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as she is a Governor at Eastern Primary School but has

		dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr D Whitelock	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as he is a Governor at Ysgol Cwm Brombil but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr R Wood	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as he is a Governor at Ysgol Bae Baglan but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr M Spooner	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as she is a Governor at Rhos Primary but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr E Latham	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as he is a Governor at Tywyn Primary School and Ysgol Bae Baglan but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr C Clement-Williams	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as she is a Governor at Baglan Primary School but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr M Harvey	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as he is a Governor at Abbey Primary School but has

		dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr. D Jones	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as he is a Governor at Cilfrew School and Llangatwg Community School but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr A Lockyer	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as he is a Governor at Gnoll Primary and YGG Castell Nedd but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr P Richards	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as he is a Governor at Blaenbaglan Primary School and Baglan Primary School but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr L Jones	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as she is a Governor at Tonnau Primary School and Melin Primary School but has dispensation to speak and vote.
Cllr P Rees	Re:	Strategic School Improvement Programme - Proposal to Establish an English-Medium 3 - 11 School to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 as he is a Governor at Crynallt Primary School and Cefn Saeson Comprehensive 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 Llangiwig Primary Schools all of which will be Discontinued 31st August 2024 (enclosed within Cabinet Papers)**

The Chief Executive, Karen Jones, provided information with regards to the delay of the issuing of the consultation report, subsequent to the tape recording which appeared on social media. The decision to delay the consultation report was taken to ensure some additional due diligence on the processes that the Council has undertaken in bringing forward the advice. The decision-making processes concerning the school reorganisation programme were considered as part of this additional work. Following this work a report was produced. The conclusion from the report indicates that the Council can take all assurances regarding its systems and processes. Some recommendations have been made within the report and this includes that meetings are accurately recorded so that openness and transparency are maintained.

The report has been shared with the Auditor General who has concluded that he does not wish to undertake specific audit work at this present time. He has acknowledged that there are some procedural items which need to be addressed and he has asked for sight of the action plan in response to the recommendations. He has also advised that when the Public Services Ombudsman work is complete he will look at the findings at that time.

The Public Services Ombudsman has advised that he is not aware of any issue that will stop the report on the agenda being discussed at the meeting. He has also advised that the focus of the remainder of his investigations will focus on the member directly and not on the systemic or broader issues.

The Director of Education, Andrew Thomas, was invited to provide an overview on the item for discussion. Mr Thomas provided a brief update with regards to two recent correspondence received, asking for reconsideration of the recommendation within the report. Mr Thomas advised that the letters did not ask to be circulated to Members. However Members will be provided with a copy of the response to be sent to both organisations, irrespective of the outcome from the meeting.

Members were advised that the report indicates the decision is subject to a three day call in, however it is intended for immediate implementation. The Statutory Notice reflects the date. The reason for this is that if Members were in agreement to progress the item, then the full statutory 28 days' notice is all within term time.

Mr Thomas categorically stated that there was no intention to close any other schools, other than the three mentioned and attached to the report to be discussed.

Mr Thomas went through some of the issues identified in the consultation. Members were provided with a rationale for the chosen site of the proposed school. Mr Thomas went through the size requirements of the new school with the pupil size indicated and highlighted that the proposed area already had outdoor playing fields etc. so these would not need to be sourced. Further, there

are no other sites within the area required to accommodate a school of the proposed size.

There are health and well-being benefits identified within the report. The new build also involves the building of a new 6 lane swimming pool and leaner pool. There is no requirement to consult on this part of the development.

Traffic was identified as a major issue within the traffic consultation responses. Mr Thomas referred to previous schools developed including Cwm Brombil and Ysgol Bae Baglan, where traffic management measures were also implemented. Due to the amount of capital expenditure available in relation to the new build of a school, there is an opportunity to consider traffic management within the area. If the development goes ahead there will be a Traffic Impact Assessment conducted. This will be undertaken by the appointed contractor and will need to meet the required planning processes. The overall traffic management at the proposed site should improve due to the rigorous nature of the processes and requirements as part of a Traffic Impact Assessment.

Transport and travel of pupils was discussed. The vast majority of pupils who would attend the new school would live within 2 miles of the proposed site. Any pupil who doesn't live within a suitable walking route or within the 2 miles will be entitled to assistance with transport. Requirements will be assessed closer to the implementation date of 2024 based on the pupils who will be attending the school.

Concerns were raised about pupil standards and well-being. Mr Thomas referred to other schools that have been created and prior concerns being raised by parents about these items. However, Members were advised that when reviews of the schools have been undertaken a year after they were opened none of the concerns raised had manifested.

In terms of the Welsh language impact, 25% of the staff would be fluent/fairly fluent in Welsh. This would be a strength in that the skills would be focused in one place so that the development of Welsh as a second language would be strengthened and go over and above the current arrangements in schools.

Members discussed the proposals outlined. Several areas of concern were raised.

Members expressed concern about 3 year olds accessing nursery provision on foot in Llangwig and also children who access school transport. The report advises that nursery education is not statutory therefore there is no entitlement to assistance with school transport. Concerns have also been raised with regards to accessing breakfast club and after school activities. It was noted in the report that transport will not be provide for these activities.

Mr Thomas acknowledged that some parents may experience difficulty with accessing nursery provision. With regards to breakfast club, it is the school responsibility to ensure that all pupils have access to breakfast and after school activities. The local authority are legally obliged to provide a breakfast club if the school ask, but the timings of such provision are determined by the school.

Members expressed their concern about the community aspect of the school closure. Members were curious with regards to what the officers consider to be a community and how the report presented can advise that the school closures will have no adverse effect on the community. Concern was expressed with regards to local shops and the importance of the passing trade of people walking to the local school.

Mr Thomas asked Members to consider if the positive benefits of the reorganisation proposals outweigh the negative impacts. He referred to the significant school community that will be created at the new school, and the well-being improvements linked to the additional support for children with additional needs. Also, the across stage phase work with Cwmtawe School. Mr Thomas was satisfied that well-being objective 2 is satisfied by the proposal.

Concerns were raised about traffic at the new site and the road that leads into the area. Members accepted that the contractor would need to deal with the traffic at the new site itself, but Members were concerned about the actual road access into the town. It was put forward by a Member that residents believed that a new road would need to be built to accommodate any new school. Mr Thomas confirmed that any new traffic management provisions as part of the planning requirements for the new school would be funded as part of the 21st Century Schools programme.

Members queried how the budget was being set in relation to the works which had not yet been identified. Mr Thomas advised that there was a substantial budget set from the £22.5million funding available for the school. However, should any necessary works exceed budget, there is an opportunity to go back and seek further funding from Welsh Government.

Members referred to the Well Being of Future Generations Act and the negative effects that the development of the new school may have on three of the identified well-being goals.

Mr Thomas confirmed the start of the process began in 2017 when a Strategic Outline Programme was placed before Members. It outlined the development of a new 3-16 school. In response to consultation this was then changed to the current proposal.

Mr Thomas went through the consultation that has been undertaken and the consultation period was extended to make sure that people could respond accordingly. Mr Thomas advised that the report has addressed the themes raised by the consultation. There have been no substantial reasons to change the recommendations within the report.

Members raised concerns about the Welsh Travel Act and the effect that the new school will have. Member queried if there would be future penalties imposed upon the Council in relation to this. Officers confirmed that Welsh Government have approved the business case for the school, so there would be no penalties.

Members raised concerns about the effect of the new school on Welsh medium schools within the area. Mr Thomas advised that from experience, this had not been the case with other schools that had been opened, and numbers in Welsh

medium schools continue to rise. Members queried what ongoing monitoring would be carried out and what action would be taken should there be a negative impact on the Welsh medium schools.

Mr Thomas confirmed that all aspects of the new curriculum would be the responsibility of the leadership and Governing Body at the new school to ensure that it is delivered accordingly. Members raised the issue of nursery pupils attending school in Powys as opposed to attending the proposed new school and this would essentially reduce the budget of the new school.

Members recognised that pupils from Godre'rgraig School were currently in temporary accommodation. Pupils are expected to stay there until the proposed new school opens in 2024. There are currently reports in progress to understand the remedial works required at the site. If the new school development proposals fail, then the Council will consider other options for those pupils. There has been one site considered within Godre'rgraig for the primary school, which could be an extremely costly site to develop. If this site was developed, the whole process for the current plans stop and a whole new business case would need to be developed for Welsh Government.

MR Thomas advised that if a new school in Godre'rgraig is developed alongside the proposed school of Alltwen and Llangiwig then this would require a school budget half a million pounds a year. Members were advised that when NPTCBC borrow to build new schools this is done over 30 years as it is a capital investment, therefore, this would be £20 million pounds over 30 years. This budget would be subsidised by every other primary school in Neath Port Talbot. Mr Thomas confirmed the proposal to develop two schools had been given consideration, however officers did not think it is an effective use of public funds. Whilst Members were concerned about the treatment of Godre'rgraig Primary School, officers stressed the value for money concept and that the whole school community would carry the revenue costs.

Members queried if there were any timescales attached to the funding from Welsh Government. Mr Thomas confirmed there were no timescales or financial penalties if the scheme was to be delayed.

Member queried if the application for the Deed of Dedication had been submitted for the proposed site? Further, where the alternative parcel of land is sited? Mr Thomas was unsure if the application had yet been submitted however he confirmed that there was no reason to believe why the application would be refused.

Mr Thomas explained how primary schools are maintained. There is a sum of £1.2million annually available to maintain all primary schools within the Borough. That money is allocated on a Building Surveyor's assessment of worst case first. Mr Thomas confirmed at least a third of the funding goes on statutory testing. Member were informed this budget keeps schools open in terms of maintenance however doesn't bring the school up to 21st century standards.

Members queried how the capacity figures for the number of children attending the proposed new school were acquired and if they have been independently verified. Mr Thomas advised that there is a responsibility to develop a school

which is future proofed. Members were reminded that Welsh Government are funding 65% of the proposed development and agreed with the projected pupil figures which have been put forward. The figures take account of the number of housing developments planned and the number of children living in the catchment who could claim a place at proposed school.

Members briefly touched upon Pontardawe swimming pool and queried why a 6 lane pool was being replaced with another 6 lane pool. Mr Thomas advised that the current pool was past its economic life and is at significant risk of business continuity economic failure, resulting in eventual closure.

Member queried why the consultation report refers to an 'improved' location for the swimming pool. Mr Thomas referred to the 2000 pupils who would have access to the facility, thus improving the economic, commercial opportunities and also the wellbeing of those students accessing the facility. It will provide access to assist with the development of lifelong habits which will help to promote a healthy lifestyle.

Some Members provided their input with regards to experiencing the same situations within their wards. Often members of the public's fears were allayed once the new school were in situ. The community use of the new buildings has vastly improved in areas where new schools have been developed.

Mr Thomas confirmed that 21 people responded in favour of the proposed development. Members were advised that it is common that more people will take part in consultation who are against a proposal, as opposed to those who support the proposals.

Members queried how the new proposal fitted in with encouraging active travel. Mr Thomas referred to previous records which indicated that 49% of children travelled to Godre'rgraig School by car. Mr Thomas referred to the overall wellbeing of the children and how the proposals contributed positively to this through the facilities and the extracurricular activities that will be provided as a result of the development.

Members raised concerns that the business plan for the proposed development was submitted to Welsh Government before any consultation was undertaken with the community.

A recorded vote was proposed and seconded and agreed in line with required procedures.

The vote was undertaken to determine which Members were for and against the recommendations detailed in the circulated report. The results of the vote were as follows:

- For – Cllrs M Crowley, S Freeguard, D Keogh, S Miller, R Mizen, S Paddison, S Penry, M Protheroe, S Rahaman, S. Renkes, S Reynolds, R Taylor, D Whitelock, R Wood, A Woolcock
- Against – Cllrs W Griffiths, J Hale, S Harris, N Hunt, J Jones, S Knoyle, A Llewelyn, R Phillips, L Purcell, A Richards, M Spooner

- Abstain– M Caddick

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

CHAIRPERSON