

## EDUCATION SKILLS AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Council Chamber - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

**Members Present:**

**9 November 2017**

**Chairperson:** Councillor A.L.Thomas

**Vice Chairperson:** Councillor M.Crowley

**Councillors:** S.ap.Dafydd, M.Ellis, S.Harris, N.T.Hunt, H.N.James, S.Miller, R.Mizen, J.D.Morgan, S.Renkes, R.L.Taylor, D.Whitelock and C.Williams

**Co-opted Voting Members:** M.Caddick and A.Amor

**Co-opted Non Voting Members:** A.Hughes

**Officers In Attendance** A.Evans, I.Guy, A.Thomas, A.Phillips, R.Crowhurst, R.Gordon, P.Walker, R.Lewis, C.Nowell, N.Evans, J.Woodman-Ralph, S. Curran and C.Davies

**Cabinet Invitees:** Councillors A.R.Lockyer and P.A.Rees

**Ward Members** Councillors S.Jones, N.E.Davies and R.Thomas

**Observers** Councillors R.G.Jones and C.Gallsworthy

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### 1. **MEMBER'S DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following Members made declarations of interest at the commencement of the meeting in relation to the undermentioned matters:-

Councillor Rachel Taylor - The report of the Head of Transformation re: Strategic School

Improvement Programme – Future of Secondary Education in the Upper Afan Valley as her children will be attending Ysgol Newydd Margam.

Councillor Sian Harris - The private report of the Head of Transformation re: Celtic Leisure Annual Report and Celtic Leisure Quarter 1 Performance as her daughter works for Celtic Leisure

Councillor Dave Whitelock - The report of the Head of Transformation re: Strategic School Improvement Programme – Future of Secondary Education in the Upper Afan Valley as he is a Governor on the Shadow Governor Board at Ysgol Newydd Margam.

2. **MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION, SKILLS AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 12TH OCTOBER 2017**

The Committee noted the minutes.

3. **MINUTES OF THE LEISURE AND CULTURE SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE HELD ON 17TH OCTOBER 2017**

The Committee noted the Minutes.

4. **SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18.**

The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme.

5. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following Cabinet Board items:

5.1 **Strategic School Improvement Programme – Future of Secondary Education in the Upper Afan Valley**

Members considered a report that sought approval to consult on the future of Secondary Education in the Upper Afan Valley. It was highlighted that the Council's responsibility is to promote high educational standards and deliver efficient primary and secondary education.

It was noted that Cymer Afan Comprehensive School has a capacity to hold in excess of 600 pupils; however, currently holds 226 pupils, which provides a significant surplus capacity of nearly 65%.

It was highlighted that the Authority is proposing to make arrangements for pupils from the upper Afan Valley to receive their secondary education at Ysgol Newydd Margam.

Members asked what guarantees could be given to ensure the safety of children travelling to Ysgol Newydd Margam via the Afan Valley Road in adverse weather conditions due to the treacherous nature of the road. Officers explained that they are unable to give guarantees but stated that measures are in place to ensure that all transport contractors are safety checked and have all the necessary insurances in place.

In addition it was queried what measures have been put in place to ensure that children are able to return home if the weather conditions deteriorate while they are in school. Officers explained that Home to School transport is provided across the County Borough on similar routes with no significant issues being reported. Officers confirmed that it is the responsibility of the school to monitor any adverse change in weather conditions and to make the necessary arrangements to insure that the children are able to return home safely.

Members were concerned that the children are going to be subject to an increase in pollution levels by being transferred to Ysgol Newydd Margam due to the vicinity of the school and the TATA Steel Site. Officers explained that no concerns have been raised by the families of children who already attend Ysgol Newydd Margam but this issue could be fed into the consultation process.

Members were concerned that children from the Afan Valley will not be able to attend after school clubs because of the lack of service buses running after 6pm to return the children home to

the Afan Valley. Officers explained that it is the responsibility of the Head Teacher to arrange after school clubs and to ensure that all the pupils have the opportunity to attend and are able to return home safely. It was stated that extracurricular activities do not always have to take place after School and can also take place during lunch-times or before the start of the school day.

Members were concerned that bullying could be an issue due to the increase in time that children would be travelling on the school bus from the Afan Valley to Ysgol Newydd Margam. Officers explained that other pupils travel to school on school buses for similar periods of time. If a school is made aware of any bullying instances it is the responsibility of the school to deal with it robustly.

Members asked if transport would be provided for children who choose to attend Maesteg Comprehensive School or Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School. Officers explained that under the Home to School Transport policy, transport is provided to the nearest 'suitable' school which in this case is Maesteg. Transport therefore would not be provided to Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School unless there was no space at Maesteg and Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School was the next nearest 'suitable' school. Officers stated that the preferred option in the contained report is not for the pupils from Cymmer Afan Comprehensive School to attend Maesteg Comprehensive School but if that was parents preferred option travel would be provided.

Officers explained that currently 88 pupils are traveling outside the County Borough to access school places so children do travel outside the county.

Members asked why the report did not highlight the Estyn Inspection Report that stated 'good progress' had been made and that the school was classed as a 'good' school. Officers stated that the educational standards of the school are not the reason for bringing forward this proposal.

The three ward Members attended the meeting and addressed the Committee.

They shared their extreme disappointment at the proposal and queried why other options had not been considered and that

Cymer Afan Comprehensive School was an important part of the Federation of the five schools within the area which is committed to working with Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council to promote and improve education in the Afan Valley. In addition, they stated that the Federation of Schools have requested that funding of all the 5 schools within the Federation is pooled. Also, in a Safeguarding report from the 6 June 2016 no significant issues in regard to the school building were highlighted.

In relation to Maesteg Comprehensive School it has been suggested that the children from Cymer Afan Comprehensive School can select to attend that school, however, there are limited places at that school. Concern was raised in relation to having a proposal to send pupils to a school that is located in a neighbouring County.

It was argued that the Upper Afan Valley does have the 'right school in the right place' as required by the report and it was stated that there was no evidence provided by the Education Directorate giving the Governing Body time to address the concerns raised within this report.

It was noted that the schools within a federation maintain their own delegated budgets and identity but are able to explore the advantages of sharing resources such as facilities. It was highlighted that as a Federation there had been no opportunity provided by the Education Directorate to look at any required savings or restructuring of the schools.

In addition, it was stated that the removal of Cymer Afan Comprehensive School would have a negative effect on the existing Federation of Schools and it was asked if consideration has been given to the terms and conditions of staff employed within Cymer Afan Comprehensive School.

It was noted that if all the children from Cymer Afan Comprehensive School transferred to Ysgol Newydd Margam the numbers of pupils attending that school would increase significantly; it was then asked why Ysgol Newydd Margam was built to accommodate more pupils than would be served by its existing catchment area.

It was stated that the completed consultation for the new school at Margam did not include the transfer of Cymer Afan pupils and it was suggested that all stakeholders affected by the closure of Groes and Dyffryn Schools should have also been consulted on the proposal to move Cymer Afan pupils to Margam.

It was noted that as part of the Federation of Schools, current Cymer Afan pupils were allowed to choose up to 6 course options from the curriculum which allowed pupils to undertake a variety of exams. It was queried why this had taken place if the proposal was for the pupils to be relocating schools before these exams could take place.

By proposing that the children from Cymer Afan Comprehensive School travel to Ysgol Newydd Margam, it was noted that the children would be travelling for approximately 50 minutes to 1 hour which would mean that they would have to leave at 7.15am and concern was expressed that this would have an impact on the health and wellbeing of those children and it could have a negative impact on school attendance figures. In addition concern was raised that if any of the children missed the bus provided they would have to catch three service buses to return home and these services stop after 6pm. Officers confirmed that the opening hours have not been agreed and can be suited to the children.

Concern was also raised that parents are less likely to participate in attending events such as Parents Evenings due to the lack of bus services. It was noted that there has been a 90% turn out for a parents evenings in Cymer Afan in 2016 and it was stated that this would not be realistic in the new school as some families would have to rely on public transport if the Pupils were moved to Margam. Officers highlighted that there are options for teachers to meet the parents in their preferred location and other options exist outside the traditional 'parents evening.;

Concern was raised that if staff within Cymer Afan Comprehensive School started to move to other teaching posts that this would have an impact on the number of teachers remaining in Cymer Afan.

Concern was expressed at the way that staff within Cymer Afan School were informed of the proposal contained within this report via Wales online on the 3 November 2017.

Members of the Committee were asked to consider the adverse effects this proposal would have on the community and future generations and to reject the proposal or at a minimum defer the proposal to allow time to have further and more thorough discussions.

Officers explained that all the points raised today by Local Members can be raised via the proposed consultation and to allow additional time the consultation could be extended if Members were supportive of the proposal to be considered at Cabinet Board.

It was explained that a building condition assessment has been undertaken identifying the areas of the school that need attention and the financial implications of this. Officers committed to sharing this information as part of the consultation.

It was highlighted that under these proposals, in line with the Strategic School Improvement Programme children would be learning in a 21st century school. Mobile technology will be integrated with a sound pedagogical base to provide pupils with enhanced learning experiences, equipping them with the key skills and motivation needed to raise standards. Evaluation of the new Ysgol Bae Baglan Comprehensive School has taken place with very positive outcomes.

Members discussed how school provision should be kept within the Valley and the issues that could arise if children have doctors and dentist appointments where they will need to be in close proximity to attend these and be able to go back to school. Officers highlighted that in relation to attendance in developing the Strategic School Improvement Programme and 21st century schools lack of attendance has not been an issue in other new schools.

Members were disappointed that the report did not focus more on the recognition of the work that had been done at Cymer Afan Comprehensive School and that in a recent publication Cymer Afan was ranked 6 out of 10 schools in Wales. Officers

explained that contained within the report is significant data on pupil performance and the Estyn Visit and that the school had come out of Special Measures. In relation to the data published by the Western Mail they only looked at 1 year of data to gain a more detailed picture more data would need to be analysed but that the proposal was not here for consideration today due to school standards.

Officers reiterated that counter proposals can be put forward as part of the consultation.

Members referenced the strategy for encouraging tourism in the Valley areas, and asked if this would impact on the numbers of children receiving Free School Meals and increase the level of funding.

It was stated that the tourism strategy is still at its early stages with no outcomes available presently.

Members asked if Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council provided support for Youth Clubs.

Officers explained that schools are responsible for monitoring the after school clubs but the Authority does have a financial investment across the Borough in supporting the Youth Service which is provided through the Families First Budget. Cynnedd also have Youth Workers who engage with young people in a variety of ways.

Members queried the impact that the loss of staffing posts within Cymer Afan Comprehensive School would have on a community that already has a high level of unemployment.

Officers explained that everything possible would be done to protect jobs and that the Authority will also liaise with governing bodies to give opportunities to staff for employment and redeployment.

Members asked whether there was a possibility of deferring the consultation until after the Christmas period.

The Leader of the Council confirmed that one of his main priorities for the new Council Administration was Education and it is the right of every child in the County Borough to experience

education in a 21st century environment. Clarification was given that if the proposal to consult was approved by the Cabinet Board, consultation would be in relation to the preferred option for the children to attend the new school at Ysgol Newydd Margam which is currently under construction. It is parental choice what school children attend which has been the consistent approach for all parents of children across the County Borough. In addition, Members were asked to consider the importance that the approach to school funding is consistent across the County Borough so that all children are treated equally. Presently, it could be seen that the children who attend Afan Valley Comprehensive School receive more money per pupil than other children in the County Borough which could be seen to equate to the costs of private education. Due to the economic climate funding is an issue across the County Borough and when school buildings are identified as requiring major maintenance to bring them up to the standards that are required by Welsh Government to support an environment to encourage learning. All views and representations were encouraged and to enable more time for the maximum amount of responses to be received it was stated that the consultation would be extended at the recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee and approval of the Cabinet Board.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Culture supported the information that the Leader had given to the Committee for them to consider as part of the Scrutiny process and that an invitation had been given by the Headmaster of Ysgol Bae Baglan for anyone to visit Ysgol Bae Baglan to see what a 21st century school looked like and the opportunities children had who attended a 21st century school.

Following scrutiny, overall the Committee were supportive of the proposals to be considered at Cabinet Board with the following amendment to the recommendation to be considered:

That the consultation commences on the 11 December 2017 and be extended until the 14 February 2018 and will include the:

- Maintenance Schedule of Cymer Afan Comprehensive School;
- Transport Analysis;
- Community Impact Assessment;

- and any other information required by Members of the Education, Skills and Culture Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Board.

## 5.2 Welsh in Education Strategic Plan

Members received a report seeking permission to re-consult on NPT's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2017-2020 as contained within the circulated report. This was due to Minister's response to the Authority's submission of the previous Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, advising that the Authority needed to consider a number of issues as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report.

Members asked for the Welsh Education Strategic Plan Forum to be added to the Forward Work Programme. Officers highlighted that dependent on the approval from Welsh Government; officers would be in a position to bring reports to future meetings.

It was noted that the recommendation was for immediate implementation.

Members asked that the outcomes of the consultation be brought back to the Education Skills and Culture Cabinet Board before being submitted to Council.

Following scrutiny, the Committee were supportive of the proposals to be considered at Cabinet Board.

## 6. ACCESS TO MEETINGS

**RESOLVED:** that pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following items of business which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

7. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following Cabinet Board items:

7.1 **Celtic Leisure Quarter 1 Performance Report**

Members received a private and confidential presentation and were updated on the performance of Celtic Leisure during the first quarter, in comparison to the submitted ten year business plan. Members asked several questions in relation to the presentation and received appropriate responses.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

**CHAIRPERSON**

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