

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 14 January 2020

PRESENT: Councillor Aled Morris Jones (Chair)
Councillor Dylan Rees (Vice-Chair)

Councillors Lewis Davies, John Griffith, Richard Griffiths, Richard O. Jones, Bryan Owen, Alun Roberts, J. Arwel Roberts, Nicola Roberts.

Co-opted Members: Mrs Anest Frazer (The Church in Wales), Mr Dyfed Wyn Jones (Parent-Governor – Primary Schools Sector), Mr Keith Roberts (The Catholic Church)

Portfolio Members

Councillor Llinos Medi Huws (Leader and Portfolio Member for Social Services)
Councillor R. Meirion Jones (Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, Culture and Youth)
Councillor Robin Williams (Portfolio Member for Finance)
Councillor R.G. Parry, OBE, FRAGS (Portfolio Member for Highways, Property and Waste) (*a Local Member in respect of items 2 & 3 on the agenda*)

IN ATTENDANCE: Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Education, Skills and Young People
Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer
Legal Services Manager
Programme, Business Planning and Performance Manager
Programme Manager (CS)
Scrutiny Manager (AGD)
Committee Officer (ATH)

APOLOGIES: Llio Johnson (Parent Governor – Secondary Schools Sector)

ALOS PRESENT: Sioned Rowe (Scrutiny Officer), Mr Gareth Parry and Llinos Roberts (on behalf of Ysgol Gymuned Bodffordd (for item 2), Mr Dafydd Jones (on behalf of Ysgol Corn Hir (for item 2), Mr Islwyn Humphreys and Emma Evans (on behalf of Ysgol Talwrn (for item 3), Dr Iestyn Pierce (on behalf of Ysgol Y Graig) (for item 3)

The Chair welcomed all those present to this extraordinary meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee including parents and representatives of Ysgol Gymuned Bodffordd, Ysgol Corn Hir, Ysgol Talwrn and Ysgol Y Graig.

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Declarations of interest were made as follows –

Councillor Dylan Rees declared a personal but not prejudicial interest with regard to item 2 on the agenda as Vice-Chair of the Governing Body of Ysgol Gymuned Bodffordd and confirmed that following legal advice, he would be speaking and voting thereon in his capacity as a Local Member.

Councillor Nicola Roberts declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in item 3 on the agenda as a member of the Governing Bodies of Ysgol Talwrn and Ysgol Y Graig and confirmed that following legal advice, she would be participating in the discussion and voting thereon.

Councillor Richard Griffiths declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in item 3 on the agenda on the basis that his prospective daughter in law is a teacher at Ysgol Y Graig and confirmed that following legal advice, he would be participating in the discussion and voting thereon.

2 THE COUNTY COUNCIL'S SCHOOLS MODERNISATION PROGRAMME - LLANGFNIA AREA : YSGOL BODFFORDD AND YSGOL CORN HIR

The report of the Director of Education, Skills and Young People with regard to the school modernisation programme in relation to the Llangefni area was presented for the Committee's consideration. The report sought the Committee's views on the proposal to *relocate and extend Ysgol Corn Hir to a different site to accommodate Ysgol Bodffordd pupils, close Ysgol Bodffordd and review the catchment areas of Ysgol Bodffordd and Ysgol Corn Hir*, in order that the Executive may consider them prior to deciding whether or not to accept the proposal and authorise the necessary statutory consultation thereon.

The Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, Culture and Youth referred to the request by the Executive in May, 2019 to ask Officers to look afresh at the various issues in relation to schools' modernisation and the requirements under the Schools' Organisation Code 2018 in the Llangefni area and to bring an appropriate report back to the Executive in due course. The report above is in response to this request and should the proposal contained therein be approved for consultation purposes by the Executive following consideration of the views of Scrutiny, a statutory consultation process will then ensue during which all stakeholders will be afforded the opportunity to respond to and comment on the proposal. The responses received at that time would then be taken into account in coming to a final decision on whether or not to proceed with the proposal and to issue statutory notices.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People guided the Committee through the proposal paper and outlined the key drivers for change set out in the Council's Schools' Modernisation Strategy as summarised in section 3 of the proposal paper. The application of these key drivers to education provision in the Llangefni area leads to the conclusion that any school modernisation would need to address a set of criteria which includes education standards; leadership and management; school building; sufficiency of school spaces; Welsh medium provision and community use (section 4). Eleven reasonable alternatives/options for the Llangefni area which encompass Ysgol Gyfun Llangefni, Ysgol Bodffordd, Ysgol Corn Hir, Ysgol Y Graig and Ysgol Talwrn have been considered – these are set out in section 5 of the proposal paper. A detailed analysis of each reasonable alternative has concluded that there is no viable whole Llangefni area solution. Consequently, and due to their close proximity, attention has focused on finding a possible solution for the Ysgol Bodffordd and Ysgol Corn Hir catchment areas and separately for the Ysgol Y Graig and Ysgol Talwrn catchment areas (addressed in detail under item 3) that would fulfil the drivers mindful also of the challenges facing those schools.

The Officer summarised the process since June 2019 which had involved the consideration of alternative options for the Llangefni area in totality. Given that this had led to the conclusion that there is no viable whole Llangefni solution, consideration has subsequently focused on identifying solutions based on the Ysgol Bodffordd/Ysgol Corn Hir and Ysgol Y Graig/ Ysgol Talwrn catchment areas having regard to the key drivers and also the challenges in those schools. A key consideration has also been the presumption against the closure of rural schools set out in the School Organisation Code 2018 and to ensure therefore that as many reasonable options as possible were explored for Ysgol Bodffordd and Ysgol Talwrn although the latter is not a designated rural school under the Code. Thirteen reasonable alternatives (inclusive of the proposal) for Ysgol Bodffordd and ten reasonable alternatives (inclusive of the proposal) for Ysgol Talwrn were considered. The majority of those options do not meet the Llangefni area drivers and are not feasible as regards long-term education provision in those schools. Legal advice on the process and the expectations of the Schools Organisation Code 2018 has been obtained.

The Officer referred to the key challenges facing Ysgol Bodffordd and Ysgol Corn Hir (section 6 of the proposal paper). Thirteen reasonable alternatives (inclusive of the proposal) for Ysgol Bodffordd and eleven reasonable alternatives (inclusive of the proposal) for Ysgol Corn Hir have been considered and analysed against the key school modernisation drivers and criteria for education provision in the Llangefni area (sections 7 and 9 of the proposal paper). Each reasonable alternative for Ysgol Bodffordd has also been assessed in relation to the likely impact on standards, the community and pupils' travelling arrangements (section 8). The assessment has shown that the proposal presented has a positive impact on standards, a neutral impact on the community and a negative impact on some pupils' travelling arrangements. It has also led to the conclusion that the Council would need to mitigate the effect of potential closure of Ysgol Bodffordd by working with the community to ensure the long-term viability of the present community centre and by providing a bus service from the village to the new Ysgol Corn Hir site for eligible pupils in line with the Authority's schools transport policy. The analysis leads the Council to put forward the proposal as presented as providing the optimum solution that addresses the key drivers for education provision in the Llangefni area and the key challenges faced by both Ysgol Bodffordd and Ysgol Corn Hir. In practice it would mean relocating Ysgol Corn Hir to a new site and the school continuing to operate into the future; the governing body of Ysgol Corn Hir would govern the new school. The Authority would seek to ensure representation on the governing body from Ysgol Bodffordd and Ysgol Bodffordd would close.

Mr Gareth Parry and Llinos Roberts were given the opportunity to present observations on the proposal paper from the perspective of Ysgol Bodffordd. Mr Gareth Parry in speaking on behalf of the Chair of Ysgol Bodffordd Governing Body and Llinos Roberts as a parent of children attending the school raised concerns in relation to –

- The ongoing uncertainty over the future of Ysgol Bodffordd due to repeated consultations on its future and the continuing threat of closure which is unsettling to staff and parents alike
- The strong community credentials of Ysgol Bodffordd and the negative impact its closure would have on community life and the village.
- The impact on the Welsh language and on local Welsh culture
- The proposal paper's reliance on outdated data and reports in evaluating standards at Ysgol Bodffordd.
- The unequal treatment of the two schools and the lack of a level playing field in the competition for jobs. The proposal means Ysgol Corn Hir will be relocated to the new school in its entirety but Ysgol Bodffordd will close. Fairer to close both schools and build a new school with a new name.

Mr Dafydd Jones, Chair of the Governing Body of Ysgol Corn Hir spoke to emphasise the pressing situation at Ysgol Corn Hir as regards school condition, over-capacity, and shortage of space and the potential effects of these shortcomings both on health and safety and on school standards. The school is a high performing Welsh school serving a Welsh community and it has high expectations of itself; however the circumstances in which it finds itself are an obstacle to moving the school forwards and to delivering the new Curriculum. The school deserves better and could achieve so much more if it had appropriate resources. Ysgol Corn Hir fully supports the proposal and believes it needs to be implemented without further delay.

It was explained that the School Organisation Code requires that consideration be given to Estyn inspections and that the most recent inspection in the case of Ysgol Bodffordd was conducted in 2015. The proposal paper does however seek to reflect the improvement work that has been undertaken at the school since that time and recognises also that the categorisation of Ysgol Bodffordd has improved from Amber (a school that requires specific support and monitoring) to Yellow (a school that requires light support and monitoring).

The Committee considered the proposal paper and views expressed by the two schools' representatives and raised the following matters during debate –

- The timing of this meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Nicola Roberts said that she had been approached by a number of parents who would have liked to attend but were unable to do so because the meeting was being held during working hours. The Chair said that he always sought to ensure that those who want to, can attend Corporate Scrutiny Committee meetings especially in light of the interest in school modernisation matters and that if he had known of these concerns beforehand he would have tried to address them – the reason for the early start this morning was the nature of the business to be considered with two items of substance before the Committee. The Legal Services Manager confirmed that dependent on the business to be discussed, the timing of the Committee could be changed accordingly – Councillor Nicola Roberts asked for confirmation in writing.
- Whether the legal advice obtained by the Authority with reference to the proposal paper could be published on the Council's website. The Legal Services Manager advised against as that would entail losing the privilege attached to the advice.
- That the urgency of the situation at Ysgol Corn Hir was fully understood and accepted by Committee. Members did not question that part of the proposal which puts forward a replacement school for Ysgol Corn Hir but some Members did challenge whether a new school for Ysgol Corn Hir had to be at the expense of Ysgol Bodffordd and whether that was the right path to take.
- Whether the proposal is fair and provides a balanced solution. Councillor Dylan Rees (also a Local Member) submitted that a more equitable approach would be to close both schools and open a new one – as it is, what is being proposed with a new school for Ysgol Corn Hir is the assimilation of Ysgol Bodffordd by Ysgol Corn Hir meaning the two schools are not on an equal footing and that there is no equality of opportunity for Ysgol Bodffordd staff.
- Assurances about the longevity and fitness for purpose of the proposed new school over time given that the Authority will be paying for it over the course of 50 years and given also that the current Ysgol Corn Hir has become unsuitable after only 25 years.
- That the best interests of all the children of this area need to be served. Councillor Nicola Roberts (also a Local Member) submitted that this would be best achieved by a new school which meets the needs of all and provides the highest quality in terms of school building and education standards. Whilst Ysgol Corn Hir is within a town it is nevertheless a community school and what the proposal seeks to achieve is to extend that community and to bring it closer together. It is the people who live within it not school buildings, that make a community, and it is their responsibility to ensure the community prospers. The current

school buildings are unsuitable and the way resources are shared across the schools and children is unequal. A solution needs to be found through the consultation and everyone needs to be encouraged to put their views across so that a complete and balanced picture can be built.

In noting the points made, Officers gave assurances that should the proposal be approved for statutory consultation, then all stakeholders would have an opportunity to make their views known during the consultation period; the Authority would prepare a detailed response to the consultation and the submissions received at that stage of the process.

Councillor Nicola Roberts proposed, seconded by Councillor J. Arwel Roberts that the Committee recommends to the Executive that it accepts the proposal as presented and proceeds to conduct the necessary statutory consultation.

Councillor Dylan Rees proposed an amendment to the effect that the Executive be recommended to undertake a statutory consultation on option 7.2 (build a new 21st Century school for Ysgol Bodffordd and Ysgol Corn Hir and close both schools) on the basis that this achieves parity for both schools in the reorganisation process. The proposal was not seconded.

Councillor Lewis Davies proposed a further amendment, seconded by Councillor Bryan Owen namely, that the Executive be recommended to consult on a new school for Ysgol Corn Hir and to keep Ysgol Gymuned Bodffordd open with a view to federalising it with another school.

In the subsequent vote the original proposal (made by Councillor Nicola Roberts) was carried by a majority of the Committee's members.

Having considered the information presented both in report form and orally at the meeting, the Committee resolved to recommend to the Executive that it approves the proposal to “relocate and extend Ysgol Corn Hir to a different site to accommodate Ysgol Bodffordd pupils, close Ysgol Bodffordd and review the catchment areas of Ysgol Bodffordd and Ysgol Corn Hir” and proceeds to conduct the necessary statutory consultation thereon.

3 THE COUNTY COUNCIL'S SCHOOLS MODERNISATION PROGRAMME - LLANGEFNI AREA : YSGOL TALWRN AND YSGOL Y GRAIG

The report of the Director of Education, Skills and Young People with regard to the school modernisation programme in relation to the Llangefni area was presented for the Committee's consideration. The report sought the Committee's views on the proposal *to increase the capacity of Ysgol Y Graig to accommodate pupils from Ysgol Talwrn, close Ysgol Talwrn and review the catchment areas of Ysgol Talwrn and Ysgol Y Graig*, in order that the Executive may consider them prior to deciding whether or not to accept the proposal and authorise the necessary statutory consultation thereon.

The Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, and Culture referred to the request by the Executive in May, 2019 to ask Officers to look afresh at the various issues in relation to schools' modernisation and the requirements under the Schools' Organisation Code 2018 in the Llangefni area and to bring an appropriate report back to the Executive in due course. The report above is in response to this request and should the proposal contained therein be approved for consultation purposes by the Executive following consideration of the views of Scrutiny, a statutory consultation process will then ensue during which all stakeholders will be afforded the opportunity to respond to and comment on the proposal.

The responses received at that time would then be taken into account in coming to a final decision on whether or not to proceed with the proposal and to issue statutory notices.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People guided the Committee through the proposal paper stating that the key drivers for change set out in the Council's Schools' Modernisation Strategy are summarised in section 3 of the proposal paper. As reported under item 2, the application of these key drivers to education provision in the wider Llangefni area leads to the conclusion that any school modernisation would need to address a set of criteria which includes education standards; leadership and management, school building; sufficiency of school spaces; Welsh medium provision and community use (section 4). Eleven reasonable alternatives/options for the Llangefni area encompassing Ysgol Gyfun Llangefni, Ysgol Bodffordd, Ysgol Corn Hir, Ysgol Y Graig and Ysgol Talwrn have been considered as set out in section 5 of the proposal paper. A detailed analysis of each reasonable alternative has concluded that there is no viable, whole Llangefni area solution. Consequently, and due to their close proximity, attention has focused on finding a possible solution for the Ysgol Bodffordd and Ysgol Corn Hir catchment areas (addressed under item 2) and separately for the Ysgol Y Graig and Ysgol Talwrn catchment areas that would fulfil the key drivers mindful also of the challenges facing those schools.

The Officer referred to the key challenges facing Ysgol Talwrn and Ysgol Y Graig (section 6) specifically and to the reasonable alternative options considered and explored with regard to each of the two schools (sections 7 and 8 of the proposal paper respectively). Ten reasonable alternatives inclusive of the proposal for Ysgol Talwrn and nine reasonable alternatives inclusive of the proposal for Ysgol Y Graig were considered and analysed against the key schools modernisation drivers. The analysis has shown that only the proposal under consideration has a positive impact on standards, the community and pupils' travelling arrangements in their totality. It has also led to the conclusion that the Council will need to mitigate the effect of potential closure on Ysgol Talwrn by providing transport for pupils attending Ysgol Talwrn to the newly expanded school. The assessment leads the Authority to put forward the proposal as presented. In practice this would mean extending Ysgol Y Graig which would continue to operate into the future; the governing body of Ysgol Y Graig would govern the extended school. The Authority would seek to ensure representation on the governing body from Ysgol Talwrn and Ysgol Talwrn would close.

Mr Islwyn Humphreys, Chair of the Governing Body of Ysgol Talwrn was given the opportunity to present observations on the proposal paper from the perspective of Ysgol Talwrn and in doing made the following points –

- That questions remain unanswered from previous consultations for example with regard to access to after school activities for Ysgol Talwrn pupils given that the road from Talwrn to Ysgol Y Graig is hazardous, and the status of the Ysgol Talwrn school building.
- The detrimental impact of the proposal on the community, on the Welsh language, on local culture and on individuals.
- That no alternative options are being offered for consultation.
- Good standards of education at Ysgol Talwrn comparable with those at Ysgol Y Graig supported by the latest data and by GwE reports with pupils across the school making sound progress and performing well and in some cases, attaining Level 6.
- Ysgol Talwrn is a flourishing school which has a good collaborative relationship with Ysgol Llanbedrgoed.
- Only 4 empty places at the school.
- The affordability of the proposal and the long-term borrowing costs for the Council on an asset that will depreciate in value.

Dr Iestyn Pierce, Chair of the Governing Body of Ysgol Y Graig spoke about the school being over capacity and the need therefore for any new extension to be able to meet the requirements in the long-term.

Councillor Nicola Roberts (also a Local Member) acknowledged that repeated consultations over the future of Ysgol Talwrn over recent years have been challenging for the school, staff, parents and for the wider community. She recognised that whilst education standards have improved at the school in recent years, Ysgol Talwrn is let down by the school building which is unfit for purpose, a weakness it shares with Ysgol Y Graig. However, in light of the good standards at Ysgol Talwrn, and for reasons of parity she queried whether consideration should be given to a cross-over of Ysgol Talwrn staff in order to retain valuable expertise. Otherwise she believed that the proposal paper addresses all the relevant considerations and she urged all interested parties to submit their views in the event of the proposal being approved for statutory consultation.

Councillor Dylan Rees (also a Local Member) questioned whether the results of the Community Impact Assessment in projecting that the proposal would have a neutral effect on the people and community of Talwrn had been understated given the community uses of the school e.g. Pensioners' Lunch Club, which would likely be affected if the proposal was implemented.

Councillor Bryan Owen suggested that the funding might be better spent on bringing Ysgol Talwrn up to date thereby helping to safeguard the services which the school provides to the community and the viability of the community itself.

In noting the points made, Officers gave assurances that should the proposal be approved for statutory consultation, then all stakeholders would have an opportunity to make their views known during the consultation period; the Authority would prepare a detailed response to the consultation and the submissions received at that stage of the process.

Councillor J. Arwel Roberts proposed, seconded by Councillor Nicola Roberts that the Committee recommends to the Executive that it accepts the proposal as presented and proceeds to conduct the necessary statutory consultation.

Councillor Lewis Davies proposed an amendment, seconded by Councillor Bryan Owen that the Executive be recommended to consult on keeping Ysgol Talwrn open with a view to federalising it with another school (possibly Ysgol Llanbedrgoch).

In the subsequent vote the original proposal (made by Councillor J. Arwel Roberts) was carried by a majority of the Committee's members.

Having considered the information presented both in report form and orally at the meeting, the Committee resolved to recommend to the Executive that it approves the proposal to "increase the capacity of Ysgol Y Graig to accommodate pupils from Ysgol Talwrn, close Ysgol Talwrn and review the catchment areas of Ysgol Talwrn and Ysgol Y Graig" and proceeds to conduct the necessary statutory consultation thereon.

**Councillor Aled Morris Jones
Chair**