

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 13 February 2024

PRESENT: Councillor Dyfed Wyn Jones (Vice-Chair) (In the Chair)
Councillor Ieuan Williams (Vice-Chair for this meeting only)

Councillors Aled M. Jones, Llio A. Owen, Keith Roberts, Sonia Williams, Arfon Wyn.

Portfolio Members

Councillors Llinos Medi (Leader and Portfolio Member for Economic Development), Neville Evans (Portfolio Member for Leisure, Tourism and Maritime), Carwyn Jones (Portfolio Member for Corporate Business and Customer Experience), Gary Pritchard (Portfolio Member for Children, Youth and Housing Services), Alun Roberts (Portfolio Member for Adults' Services and Community Safety), Nicola Roberts (Portfolio Member for Planning, Public Protection and Climate Change), Dafydd Roberts (Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language), Dafydd Rhys Thomas (Portfolio Member for Highways, Waste and Property), Robin Williams (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Member for Finance).

IN ATTENDANCE: Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer
Director of Education, Skills, and Young People
Head of Democracy (DS)
Senior Education Manager (AE)
Legal Services Manager (RJ)
Programme Manager (Corporate) (AH)
Solicitor (AO)
Scrutiny Manager (AGD)
Committee Officer (ATH)
Webcasting Officer (FT)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Douglas Fowlie, R. Llewelyn Jones, Jackie Lewis, Mrs Wenda Owen (Co-opted Member – The Church in Wales), Gillian Thompson (Co-opted Member – Parent Governor representative for the primary schools sector)

ALSO PRESENT: None

In the absence of the Chair, Councillor Douglas Fowlie, the meeting was chaired by the Vice-Chair, Councillor Dyfed Wyn Jones. Councillor Ieuan Williams was elected to serve as Vice-Chair of the Committee for this meeting only.

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2 PROPOSAL TO TRANSFER YSGOL CARREGLEFN PUPILS TO YSGOL LLANFEHELL AND CLOSE YSGOL CARREGLEFN

The report of the Director of Education, Skills and Young People setting out a proposal to transfer pupils from Ysgol Carreglefn to Ysgol Llanfechell and close Ysgol Carreglefn was presented for the Committee's consideration and scrutiny.

The report was introduced by Councillor Dafydd Roberts, Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language who said that the Committee is being asked to scrutinise and to forward its views to the Executive on the proposal to transfer pupils from Ysgol Carreglefn to Ysgol Llanfechell and close Ysgol Carreglefn, the recommendation to the Executive that Officers be authorised to publish a statutory notice on the proposal along with the recommendation that Officers be authorised to hold discussions with the community about securing the long term viability of the present school building as a community resource. The Director of Education, Skills and Young People summarised the basis for the proposal saying that the paper presents the outcome of work undertaken to look at a range of options for the future of Ysgol Carreglefn for the following reasons –

- Ysgol Carreglefn has the highest cost per pupil of all Wales primary schools at £17,200 per pupil which is over three times higher than the average cost per pupil for Anglesey at £5,240.
- Ysgol Carreglefn has 80% surplus places with 9 pupils currently attending the school, 4 of whom are in Year 6. The school's forecast predicts 5 or fewer pupils attending the school from September 2024 onwards.
- Ysgol Carreglefn has the second highest carbon emissions per pupil of all Anglesey's primary schools at 1,167kgCO₂e per pupil compared to the average of 217kgCO₂e per pupil.
- There is a current and projected future maintenance cost of £317,350 at Ysgol Carreglefn.
- All pupils at Ysgol Carreglefn are taught in a single class with pupils aged 4-11 being taught together which can create challenges in meeting their different needs.
- Ysgol Carreglefn has had difficulty in appointing a headteacher and currently shares a headteacher with another school.

As Ysgol Carreglefn has fewer than 10 registered pupils at the 2024 January Census Point the School Organisation Code allows local authorities to undertake a streamlined procedure to bring about official closure consisting solely of the issuing of a notice of closure with the requirement to conduct a general consultation being waived. Should the proposal be approved by the Executive a statutory notice of closure will be issued, following which there will be a 28-day objection period running from 1 March to 1 April 2024. An objection report will subsequently be drafted and presented to the relevant committee(s) before a final decision is made. If a decision is made to close Ysgol Carreglefn then the closure would become effective in August 2024 and pupils from Ysgol Carreglefn would transfer to Ysgol Llanfechell from September 2024.

Acknowledging that the proposed closure of a school is a difficult prospect, the Committee sought clarification and assurances with regard to the following matters in considering the proposal –

- The position with regard to the school's playing field since the Carreglefn Memorial is situated on the approach to the playing field

The Committee was advised by the Director of Education, Skills, and Young People that the playing field forms part of the school.

- Whether parents of pupils who would be affected by the closure of Ysgol Carreglefn may nominate a different school to that of Ysgol Llanfechell for their child/children to attend.

The Committee was advised by the Director of Education, Skills, and Young People that the School Organisation Code 2018 states that where proposals involve the closure of a school, then information about the name and location of the proposed alternative provision must be included which in this instance is Ysgol Llanfechell. Although the proposal notes that pupils from Ysgol Carreglefn would transfer to Ysgol Llanfechell in the event of Ysgol Carreglefn's closure, the statutory notice must clearly state that that is subject to parental choice. Parents can apply for their children to attend any school and in specifying Ysgol Llanfechell as the alternative provision the Authority is providing parents and their children with the assurance that they can continue their education in the nearest school unless they have indicated otherwise.

- Whether there are any financial implications to the proposal in addition to the £126k net annual savings which implementing the proposal would be expected to generate through the school funding formula.

The Committee was advised by the Director of Education, Skills and Young People that there would be an additional cost to transport eligible pupils from Ysgol Carreglefn to Ysgol Llanfechell in accordance with the Authority's school transport policy as the road between Carreglefn and Llanfechell is considered unsuitable for learners of that age to walk to and from school. However those costs would be minimal. Implementing the proposal could also incur transitional costs as noted in section 8 of the proposal paper which details the financial impact of the proposal if implemented.

The Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer explained the process and the budget adjustments that would be made in respect of both Ysgol Llanfechell and Ysgol Carreglefn up to and following the closure of the latter should the proposal be implemented there being no new build project involved in the proposal in this instance.

With regard to the possibility of additional funding being transferred to Ysgol Llanfechell before the 2024/25 financial year to help with the transition of pupils from Ysgol Carreglefn the Director of Education, Skills and Young People advised that school budgets are set based on pupil numbers in September the previous year. Should the proposal be approved then Ysgol Llanfechell would receive additional funding from April 2025 to reflect the transfer of pupils from Ysgol Carreglefn. However as the proposal involves the closure of Ysgol Garreglefn midway through the financial year in September 2024 a portion of the additional funding would transfer to Ysgol Llanfechell at that time. The Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer confirmed that although school funding regulations state that funding must be allocated according to the funding formula for schools it is likely that Ysgol Llanfechell would receive extra funding over and above what would be allocated to it if the formula was adjusted for 4 additional pupils to enable the school to use it for that purpose.

- The future of the Carreglefn school building should the school cease to operate as such. Councillor Llio Owen speaking as a Local Member said that although many in the local community understood the reasons for the proposal, they were saddened by the prospect of the school closing. She emphasised that the community is however keen to retain the school building as a historic and long-standing resource in the village and she wanted to know the likelihood of this being possible.

The Committee was advised by the Legal Services Manager that the future of the school building and the associated memorial is a separate matter to the proposal which is to discontinue the school as an education provision and is not a consideration or factor in the proposal. The future of the Ysgol Carreglefn building will be the subject of subsequent discussions if the proposal is implemented.

- The arrangements for helping pupils from Ysgol Garreglefn transition to Ysgol Llanfechell and adapt to a new school environment and larger classes.

The Committee was advised by the Director of Education, Skills and Young People that no support will be arranged until after a final decision is made. Should the proposal be approved, it is foreseen that there would be engagement between the two schools before the end of the school year in the form of joint activities, sharing information and facilitating a visit to Ysgol Llanfechell. Question and answer leaflets for parents and pupils would also be produced.

- The additional procedures and requirements which the Council has followed in formulating the proposal to close Ysgol Carreglefn as a designated rural school given that the School Organisation Code has established a procedural presumption against the closure of rural schools and requires local authorities to follow a more detailed set of procedures in bringing forward any such proposals.

The Committee was advised by the Director of Education, Skills, and Young People and by the Programme Manager that a range of possible reasonable alternatives to closure has been considered by the Authority as required by the Code and as set out in section 6 of the proposal paper. Those alternatives as well as the proposed option have been assessed in terms of their likely impact on the quality and standards in education, the community and on travelling arrangements for pupils (section 7.2 of the paper). A community impact assessment has been prepared (set out in Appendix 2) to explore the overall long-term impact on people and the community of the closure of a rural school. The assessment of the options shows that there are some positive and negative impacts to the reasonable alternatives considered. The analysis shows that the proposal to transfer pupils from Ysgol Carreglefn to Ysgol Llanfechell and close Ysgol Carreglefn has an overall positive effect on standards, community aspects and pupils' travel arrangements. While the proposal is shown to have a negative impact on travel arrangements this is not anticipated to be significant as Ysgol Llanfechell is only 2.2 miles from Ysgol Carreglefn and currently only 47% of pupils who live within the catchment area of Ysgol Carreglefn attend the school.

- Whether the proposal will help strengthen the Welsh language.

The Committee was advised by the Director of Education, Skills, and Young People that both Ysgol Llanfechell and Ysgol Carreglefn are Welsh medium schools with both being in category 3 in terms of language category where Welsh is the main language for the school, the school has a strong Welsh ethos and all pupils will be supported to use the Welsh language inside and outside the classroom. There would therefore be no change in the language category. As at January 2023, only 10% of pupils from Ysgol Carreglefn speak Welsh at home compared to 48% of pupils at Ysgol Llanfechell. The proposal could therefore present more opportunities for pupils from Carreglefn to immerse themselves in the Welsh language with other Welsh speaking pupils at Ysgol Carreglefn.

- The arrangements for supporting staff who would be affected by the implementation of the proposal.

The Committee was advised by the Director of Education, Skills and Young People that the Authority would ensure that there is an ongoing dialogue with staff including keeping them informed of potential openings and alternative employment opportunities as well as support for their wellbeing. Additionally, pay protection arrangements apply for a period.

Councillor Llinos Medi, Leader of the Council and a Local Member emphasised the importance of the Ysgol Carreglefn building as the last community resource available to

the community of Carreglefn which is a very active community as the report attests to. She expressed her appreciation to all who had contributed towards the efforts to keep the school open in recent years but that the decline in pupil numbers means that the proposal presented is seen as the best solution to address the challenges facing the two schools and the key drivers for the area. In stressing the closeness of the communities of Carreglefn and Llanfechell she referred to the fact that both are served by the same community council.

Whilst the Committee recognised and accepted the challenges involved in maintaining Ysgol Carreglefn with so few pupils, there was a strong consensus among the Scrutiny Committee's members that should the proposal be approved and implemented, then every effort should be made to ensure the continuation of the Carreglefn school building as a community asset. In supporting that sentiment Councillor Arfon Wyn felt that similar support should be given to other communities who would like to acquire the school building following the closure of the local school in Bro Aberffraw, Llangaffo and Bodorgan for example. Councillor Aled Morris Jones felt that this situation need not have arisen had the Authority approached the situation in Ysgol Carreglefn differently some years ago and that consequently parents had decided to take their children to schools elsewhere leading to the decline in pupil numbers at the school. Some suggestions were made regarding the contents of the proposal paper in that it would have been helpful to have included a summary of the requirements of the School Organisation Code with regard to rural schools to show that those had been considered, as well as clarification of the Authority's School Transport Policy.

The Chief Executive acknowledged that a school closure proposal is difficult to consider and is not presented lightly, and he referred to the comprehensiveness of the proposal paper in providing assurance that every reasonable alternative option had been considered and explored. He also acknowledged the strength of feeling with regard to safeguarding the school building for the community's use and assured the Committee that if the proposal is implemented, the Authority is committed to having that discussion with the community of Carreglefn and to finding the best solution in the circumstances and within the policies and regulations in which the Authority operates.

Having scrutinised the proposal to transfer pupils from Ysgol Carreglefn to Ysgol Llanfechell and close Ysgol Carreglefn and having regard to all the information presented both written by way of the proposal paper and orally by Officers at the meeting, the Committee resolved –

- **To support and to recommend to the Executive the proposal to transfer pupils from Ysgol Carreglefn to Ysgol Llanfechell and close Ysgol Carreglefn (*Councillor Aled M. Jones voted against for the reason stated above*).**
- **To support and to recommend to the Executive that Officers be authorised to publish a statutory notice on the proposal. (*Councillor Aled M. Jones voted against for the reason stated above*).**
- **To unanimously support and to recommend to the Executive that Officers be authorised to hold discussions with the community with a view to provide an opportunity to secure the long-term viability of the present school building as a community resource.**

**Councillor Dyfed Wyn Jones
Chair**