

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the extraordinary virtual meeting held on 17 December, 2020

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

Councillors John Griffith, Richard O. Jones, Bryan Owen, Alun 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 item 2 on the agenda)*
Councillor Carwyn Jones (Portfolio Member for Major Projects and Economic Development)
Councillor Dafydd Rhys Thomas (Portfolio Member for Corporate Business)
Councillor Alun Mummary (Portfolio Member for Housing and Supporting Communities)

IN ATTENDANCE: Chief Executive
Director of Education, Skills and Young People
Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer
Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer
Head of Profession (HR) and Transformation
Head of Highways, Property and Waste
Head of Democratic Services
Programme, Business Planning and Performance Manager
Architectural Services Manager (GWT)
Principal Valuation Officer (TDE)
Scrutiny Manager (AGD)
Committee Officer (ATH)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Richard Griffiths

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Dafydd Roberts, Mr Dafydd Jones (Chair of the Governing Body of Ysgol Corn Hir), Mr Gareth Parry (Member of the Governing Body of Ysgol Bodffordd), Programme Manager (AH), Scrutiny Officer (SR), Mr Gareth Wyn Williams (Local Democracy Reporter)

The Chair welcomed all those present to this meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee and he extended a particular welcome to Mr Dafydd Jones, Chair of the Governing Body of Ysgol Corn Hir and to Mr Gareth Parry, a member of the Governing Body of Ysgol Bodffordd who were both present to make representations in relation to the business under item 2 on the agenda. Members and Officers introduced themselves and the Chair explained the process that would be followed in dealing with item 2 on the agenda.

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Dylan Rees declared a personal but not prejudicial interest with regard to item 2 on the agenda as the Vice-Chair of the governing body of Ysgol Bodffordd.

2 THE COUNCIL'S SCHOOLS' MODERNISATION PROGRAMME – LLANGEFNI AREA: YSGOL CORN HIR AND YSGOL BODFFORDD

The report of the Director of Education, Skills and Young People with regard to the schools' modernisation programme in relation to the Llangefni area was presented for the Committee's consideration. The report set out the responses to the statutory consultation held in February/March 2020 on Ysgol Corn Hir and Ysgol Bodffordd and sought the Committee's views on the recommendation that the most appropriate way forward following the statutory consultation is the other reasonable alternative which is *to build a new school for Ysgol Corn Hir and leave Ysgol Bodffordd as it is*.

The Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, Culture and Youth introduced the report with general remarks about the Schools' Modernisation Programme which in this case involves weighing and assessing the future of Ysgol Corn Hir and Ysgol Bodffordd and the consequent impact on all the stakeholders, and in particular the children at the two school whose interests and well-being should be the predominant consideration. Modernising schools can be a contentious issue and is among the most challenging aspects of the Council's work; parents' concerns on this matter are understandable and appreciated. The schools' modernisation programme sets the groundwork for the future of schools over the next 50 years at a time when they are under pressure from budgetary cuts, burdensome maintenance costs and meeting the requirements of the New Curriculum to which can now be added the impact of Covid. The Council is duty bound to consider how the school system can be made more effective in the sense of creating the conditions under which teachers and pupils can flourish and also how it can be made more efficient in terms of making the best use of resources and ensuring that all schools receive their fair share of the budget. The Schools' Modernisation Strategy which was updated in October, 2018 links into the Council's major strategies and priorities as set out in section 2 of the introductory report and this proposal spans Band A and Band B in the Strategy's timetable.

Between 6 February and 20 March, 2020 a statutory consultation on the future of the two schools in question was held. Officials were authorised to carry out the consultation after the Corporate Scrutiny Committee and the Executive considered the proposal paper in January, 2020. The consultation closed on the last day of school before the first lockdown period as a result of the global pandemic that transformed education provision for a time. The Portfolio Member said that it is important to note that the Council has received a letter from the School Organisation and Admissions Branch of Welsh Government confirming that Welsh Government Ministers are giving the Council an extension until March, 2021 to publish any proposal. The Council has operated in accordance with the School Organisation Code 2018 throughout the pandemic period.

The key drivers for change as set out in the Schools' Modernisation Strategy 2018 include improving educational standards; improving leadership and management; ensuring that school buildings are fit for purpose; reducing the number of surplus places (in the case of the Llangefni area ensuring sufficient capacity); reducing the overall cost of

education and the variation in cost per pupil; maintaining and improving Welsh-medium provision and increasing the community use of school buildings.

The Portfolio Member for Education referred to the role of elected members within the process who, as well being accountable to their individual communities have as the Council's policy makers, a number of strategic and corporate management responsibilities including governing their areas well and participating in the work of managing and governing the Council which also involves scrutiny.

The Portfolio Member concluded his introduction by thanking all those who had contributed to the process.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People guided the Committee through the written report and highlighted the main points. He referred to the statutory consultation which was held between 6 February and 20 March, 2020 which considered a number of proposals including the Council's original proposal for the two schools which was *to re-locate and extend Ysgol Corn Hir to a different site to accommodate pupils from Ysgol Bodffordd, close Ysgol Bodffordd and review the catchment areas of Ysgol Bodffordd and Ysgol Corn Hir*. Following the statutory consultation the proposal that is being recommended is the other reasonable alternative which is *to build a new school for Ysgol Corn Hir and leave Ysgol Bodffordd as it is*.

There were 823 online responses and paper responses to the consultation. Responses were received from staff, parents, governors and children at both schools as well as from individuals and organisations (summary provided at section 5 of the report). The significant feedback from the majority of stakeholders associated with the two schools confirmed acceptance of the original proposal with regard to the need for a new school for Ysgol Corn Hir but questioned why this should be at the expense of Ysgol Bodffordd. As part of the process, other educational models were put forward and were assessed by officers against the criteria and drivers of the current Schools' Modernisation Strategy (analysis at section 6.4 of the report). After considering all the alternatives and following a comprehensive analysis of their strengths and weaknesses against the drivers of the Schools' Modernisation Strategy, the other reasonable alternative proposed by stakeholders is considered to be the most appropriate way forward because it meets most of the key challenges faced by Ysgol Bodffordd. This would equate to a partial implementation of the original proposal i.e. a new building would be provided for Ysgol Corn Hir, but Ysgol Bodffordd would not close and its pupils would not be moved to the new school building. The proposal has changed for the following reasons -

- Standards at Ysgol Bodffordd – Ysgol Bodffordd has improved in terms of its category moving upwards from Amber in 2015 to Yellow (B) in 2019.
- Curriculum Delivery – Ysgol Bodffordd is in a strong position to collaborate with other schools in the local area to deliver the curriculum.
- The Welsh language – with 60 pupils at Ysgol Bodffordd (85%) and 138 pupils at Ysgol Corn Hir (61%) speaking Welsh at home (PLASC 2019) Ysgol Bodffordd and Ysgol Corn Hir have the potential to sustain and further develop the existing Welsh-medium provision.
- Capacity – the other reasonable alternative meets the capacity needs under consideration as part of the original proposal and therefore meets the expected future increase in pupil numbers.
- Travel arrangements – the other reasonable alternative is unlikely to change pupils' current travel arrangements. Pupils from Bodffordd, who at present walk or cycle to school are likely to be able to continue to do so without probable changes to the carbon footprint.
- Bodffordd Community Centre – there will be no changes. As a result, the community centre at Ysgol Bodffordd can continue to be used as at present.

- The School Organisation Code 2018 – Ysgol Bodffordd is identified in the Code as a Rural School, and as a result the Council has followed a more detailed set of procedures and requirements in formulating the other reasonable alternative. (The Code does however note that a presumption in favour of rural schools does not mean that a rural school will never close).

Impact assessments in relation to the Equality Act, Language, Community and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 were conducted and are included as one composite Impact Assessment under Appendix 1 to the consultation report. A total of 338 responses to the Impact Assessment were received a breakdown of which is given at section 6 of the introductory report. The number of responses to the impact assessment question provides 95% certainty that the response is correct and matches the feelings of the rest of the consultation respondents. A 95% confidence level means that if the survey was conducted 100 times, the same results would be provided 95% of the time. The Impact Assessment remains a live document and has been updated to include stakeholder comments received during the statutory consultation period; the current assessment includes an assessment relating to the new proposal recommended for implementation. The Impact Assessment will continue to be regularly updated throughout the development period so that should another risk/issue arise, the Council in partnership with the local community can put in place mitigation measures to overcome the risk or issue that arises. This arrangement will operate throughout the development phase and will be accountable to the Corporate Programme Board for Services Transformation.

The cost of building a new school for Ysgol Corn Hir is estimated to be approximately £9m to £10m. Subject to approval, it will be funded by a Welsh Government contribution of 50% through the 21st Century School Band A programme with the Isle of Anglesey County Council contributing the other 50%.

There were no questions by the Committee at this point on the case for change presented by the Portfolio Member for Education and the Director of Education, Skills and Young People.

Mr Dafydd Jones, Chair of the Governing Body of Ysgol Corn Hir was invited by the Chair to present the perspective of Ysgol Corn Hir in respect of the proposal.

Mr Jones, as well as thanking the Chair for the opportunity to speak at this meeting thanked the Officers for their work in collating and analysing the volume of responses to the consultation. He confirmed that the recommended proposal to build a new school for Ysgol Corn Hir and to leave Ysgol Bodffordd as it is, comes as a relief to everyone at Ysgol Corn Hir and is the first time in 5 years that a proposal regarding the future of Ysgol Corn Hir is not subject to the future of another school. As far as he knew no one had ever argued against a new school for Ysgol Corn Hir - the objections that have hampered previous proposals have all been related to the proposed closure of other schools. He thought it important to remind Members why Ysgol Corn Hir needs their support for this proposal and he referred to the current conditions at the school which is struggling with a lack of space. The school is overflowing and the building is now wholly inadequate for today's educational needs never mind the requirements of the new curriculum. When he last addressed this Committee in January, 2020 Ysgol Corn Hir was 13% over the 203 pupil capacity; it now has 236 pupils and is 17% over capacity having had to refuse admission to 5 pupils from other schools since September, 2020. Mr Jones described to the Committee how insufficient space coupled with the need to comply with Covid-19 restrictions is affecting life at the school meaning that some of the classrooms can only accommodate 4 pupils and a teacher (from a class of 24) with social distancing and due to the communal hall being too small, 3 instead of 2 daily dinner sittings have had to be held since September. The lack of space has implications for health and safety and personal privacy – counselling sessions have to be held in corridors as do lessons taken by peripatetic teachers; there is no space for pupils' coats and bags which pose a hazard

when pupils are moving from one class to another; the hall cannot accommodate more than 30 pupils for PE lessons and lacks the space to conduct whole school services. Toilet facilities are also inadequate. A backlog of maintenance works means that some classrooms have leaking roofs. Despite these and other drawbacks which make it difficult for the school to flourish, Ysgol Corn Hir has nevertheless succeeded in maintaining standards throughout the year and it remains a Green category school (a school that is performing well and needs the lowest level of support). Mr Jones further referred to the ways in which Ysgol Corn Hir has contributed prominently to local and national initiatives including in relation to policy development, the development of an OU teacher training course, leading on preparing for new ALN legislation and schools self-evaluation. He hoped that he had shown how hard everyone at Ysgol Corn Hir has worked to ensure the highest possible standards of education, but even with best efforts the school will not be able to sustain those standards in the years to come without the necessary investment which is why he was asking the Committee to support the proposal.

There were no questions by the Committee for Mr Dafydd Jones but in response to a query by the Chair, the Chief Executive confirmed that 3 consultations (including non-statutory consultation) had been held with regard to Ysgol Corn Hir and Ysgol Bodffordd.

Mr Gareth Parry, speaking on behalf of Ysgol Bodffordd likewise thanked the Committee for the opportunity to speak and for the hard work undertaken by Officers over the past few months. Referring to the proposal he emphasised that stakeholders at Ysgol Bodffordd had never taken issue with building a new school for Ysgol Corn Hir recognising that there is a need for it but had argued against doing so at the expense of Ysgol Bodffordd. Ysgol Bodffordd is a designated rural school and is a community school in every sense of the word; it is a school whose language is Welsh and is an integral part of a busy community centre which has proved especially valuable as a community hub during the current pandemic. It is also a school that is full. Mr Parry confirmed that the recommended proposal for a new school for Ysgol Corn Hir and the retention of Ysgol Bodffordd is welcomed by Ysgol Bodffordd and all involved with the school, and subject to the proposal being approved, he wished Ysgol Corn Hir well.

Councillor R.G. Parry, OBE, FRAGS, Executive Member and Local Member said that he was glad of the proposal to build a new school for Ysgol Corn Hir as there is a real need for it the school being overfull. He re-emphasised that schools' modernisation is undertaken for the benefit of the children and that subject to approval, the children at Ysgol Corn Hir will be able to enjoy modern facilities in a building that is fit for purpose. He hoped the Committee would lend its support to the proposal.

Councillor Dylan Rees, a Local Member and a member of the Committee, in highlighting that he had been consistent throughout in not wanting to see Ysgol Bodffordd close explained why his perspective in this case was different to that he took in dealing with Ysgol Talwrn and he cited the following reasons –

- That every case needs to be considered and assessed individually
- That Ysgol Bodffordd is full whereas Ysgol Talwrn has empty places
- That the community centre is an essential part of Ysgol Bodffordd the village having no other facility to house community activities including the 18 organisations that make use of the centre. Talwrn has a village hall that is separate to the school.
- That repair and maintenance costs at Ysgol Bodffordd amount to a third of the costs pertaining to Ysgol Talwrn.
- Ysgol Bodffordd is a designated rural school under the School Organisation Code 2018 whereas Ysgol Talwrn is not.

He noted the significant feedback from the consultation and thanked the Officers for listening to the representations made and in light of those, coming to a different

conclusion. He added that he had conducted a telephone survey with parents, and could confirm that 42 (89%) of the 47 parents contacted (representing 64 children who attend Ysgol Bodffordd) stated that they disagreed with the original proposal which involved closing Ysgol Bodffordd. He recognised the great need for a new school for Ysgol Corn Hir and asked for clarification of the timeline for the new school build in the event that the proposal is approved.

The Programme, Business Planning and Performance Manager advised that it was difficult to give a completion date for a capital project that has not begun because a number of things can happen along the way to cause delay. However, subject to approval, the Authority would be looking to open the new Ysgol Corn Hir in the 2022/23 education year.

There was consensus among the Committee's members regarding the merits of the proposal. Councillor John Griffith in voicing his support asked for clarification of the financial implications of the Council's would be £4.5m contribution towards the project given the current economic situation. The Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer advised that it is important to look beyond individual schemes and the costs associated with them and view them instead as part of an Island wide schools' modernisation programme where some projects generate savings as a result of school closures whereas others incur costs because they create additional capacity. Although the cost of addressing the shortage of places in the Llangefni area where some schools are heavily oversubscribed is higher than the cost of the current situation, those costs should be seen in the context of the savings created by the schools' modernisation projects already implemented in other parts of the Island. In addition, the availability of Welsh Government funding which will provide 50% of the funds in this case provides an opportunity for capital investment in schools that may not be repeated. The need for a new school for Ysgol Corn Hir is accepted and would have to be addressed by the Council at some point in future in all likelihood at a far higher cost than that of the current proposed project which will be co-funded by Welsh Government.

Councillor Bryan Owen welcomed the alternative proposal which will see Ysgol Bodffordd remain open and he reiterated his views about the centrality of schools in ensuring the viability of rural communities and the Welsh language pointing out that this view is shared by the Education Minister. With this in mind he suggested that there was still merit in the Executive's considering whether the £6m planned expenditure on extending Ysgol Y Graig and closing Ysgol Talwrn could not be saved by designing a new Ysgol Corn Hir that would be large enough to accommodate the surplus pupils in Llangefni. He called for equanimity in taking the schools' modernisation programme forwards in other parts of the Island and for consultations to be meaningful.

The Chief Executive in responding advised that although the School Organisation Code 2018 contains a presumption in favour of rural schools, it also acknowledges that this does not mean that a rural school will never close. Whilst closing a school is always a difficult proposal, it is the Authority's duty to ensure that schools and children across the Island are treated equitably, that resources are shared fairly and that opportunities are provided equally. The current situation wherein there is significant variation in the cost per pupil and where the cost of simply maintaining the school estate is approaching £20m is not sustainable. The 21st Century Schools Programme provides an opportunity to address these issues where the burden of funding is shared by Welsh Government. This opportunity may not be available in future especially given the drain on resources which responding to the Covid-19 pandemic is proving to be. A school is one element of a community; sustainability becomes more of a challenge when parents as is their entitlement, choose to take their children to schools elsewhere outside of their communities. The Authority has always taken a comprehensive approach to conducting

consultation and has in the past – although not required to do so - carried out non statutory consultations out of respect for communities. Consultations are held in compliance with the requirements of the School Organisation Code 2018.

The Director of Education, Skills, and Young People reiterated that a number of options have been considered in respect of the configuration of schools in the Llangefni area and their advantages and disadvantages have been carefully evaluated against the drivers in the Schools' Modernisation Strategy 2018. With regard to Ysgol Corn Hir and Ysgol Bodffordd, the professional opinion following consultation, is that the other reasonable alternative as outlined represents the best way forward for this part of Llangefni. The Programme, Business Planning and Performance Manager confirmed that a variety of options have been considered along the journey with communities providing their views during the course of this process. The suggestion of an option that involves a new school for Ysgol Corn Hir large enough to take surplus pupils in Llangefni and not extending Ysgol Y Graig has not formed part of the community response and so as a new option would have to be re-consulted upon thereby creating more uncertainty.

The Portfolio Member for Education, Skills and Young People spoke about the different elements that make up communities of which a school is one and the effect which the policy of choice has on communities where parents choose to send their children to schools other than their community school. All communities are subject to demographic change and the closure of a school does not inevitably lead to the decline of a community. He referred to the challenge of creating an education service that meets the needs of all parents and highlighted that the Authority has in light of the consultation response, come to a different viewpoint in this case.

Councillor Richard Owain Jones wanted assurance that the emphasis on the community aspects of Ysgol Bodffordd does not come at the expense of the educational provision. The Director of Education, Skills and Young People provided assurance by explaining that the most important component of a school are its children and young people supported by an effective body of staff at classroom level who are able to work with the children. To realise this, robust leadership, vision and co-operation are required. From his previous experience as a Head teacher, he was assured that the vision and desire to continue improving is strong in Ysgol Bodffordd, and that the school and its governing body have plans to make that happen. This is both the school's and the Learning Service's priority and applies to Ysgol Bodffordd as it does to all the Authority's schools. After considering the views presented by parents, staff, governors and others during the consultation, the Authority has been persuaded that Ysgol Bodffordd is in a good place and it is confident that the school can continue on its improvement journey which in reality is a process that does not end as better more effective ways of teaching and learning continue to be sought for all schools.

Mrs Anest Frazer, Co-opted Member and Church in Wales representative in recognising that difficult decisions have to be made when considering the future of schools said that the greatest threat to justice is injustice and that the Committee's role today is to look at reconciling the education provision across the county, and to ensure that all children have the necessary space to help them succeed. She said that as in last week's meeting when the Committee discussed the future of Ysgol Talwrn and Ysgol Y Graig, her decision would be based on ensuring equality of provision and opportunity for the Island's school children within the limited resources that are available and also on ensuring that those resources are used to maintain education standards for all pupils.

The Chair in conclusion briefly summarised the main issues arising from the discussion.

Councillor Bryan Owen proposed, seconded by Councillor Dylan Rees that the Committee supports the proposal to build a new school for Ysgol Corn Hir and leave Ysgol Bodffordd as it is i.e. the option as recommended by the Officers in the written report.

In the ensuing vote, the proposal was carried unanimously.

Having considered all the information presented and the representations made, the Committee RESOLVED unanimously to recommend to the Executive that the most appropriate way forward following statutory consultation is the other reasonable alternative, namely to build a new school for Ysgol Corn Hir and leave Ysgol Bodffordd as it is.

Councillor Aled Morris Jones
Chair