

THE EXECUTIVE

Minutes of the extraordinary virtual meeting held on 15 March, 2021

PRESENT:	Councillor Llinos Medi (Chair) Councillor Ieuan Williams (Vice-Chair) Councillors Richard Dew, Carwyn Jones, R. Meirion Jones, Alun Mummery, R.G. Parry, OBE FRAGS, Dafydd Rhys Thomas, Robin Williams
IN ATTENDANCE:	Chief Executive Deputy 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 Committee Officer (ATH)
APOLOGIES:	None
ALSO PRESENT:	Councillors Glyn Haynes, Kenneth Hughes, Dafydd Roberts, Director of Social Services, Communications Officer (GJ), Mr Gareth Wyn Williams (Local Democracy Reporter)

The Chair welcomed all those present to this extraordinary virtual meeting of the Executive.

1. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Mr Marc Jones, Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer declared a personal but not prejudicial interest with regard to item 2 on the agenda his father-in-law being a member of Ysgol Talwrn Governing Body.

2. OBJECTION REPORT – LLANGFNFI AREA SCHOOLS' MODERNISATION (YSGOL TALWRN AND YSGOL Y GRAIG)

The report of the Director of Education, Skills and Young People setting out the objections received following the publication of a statutory notice of the Council's intention to increase the capacity of Ysgol Y Graig to accommodate pupils from Ysgol Talwrn, close Ysgol Talwrn and review the catchment areas of Ysgol Y Graig and Ysgol Talwrn was presented for the Executive's consideration.

The Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, Culture and Youth provided a summary of the background to the proposal which formed part of the Schools' Modernisation Programme in the Llangefni area and referred to the statutory consultation that took place between 6 February and 20 March, 2020 on the future of the two schools. After being paused because of the pandemic the matter was scrutinised by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 10 December, 2020 and was then considered by the Executive on 17 December, 2020 which took the decision to increase the capacity of Ysgol Y Graig to

accommodate pupils from Ysgol Talwrn, close Ysgol Talwrn and review the catchment areas of Ysgol Y Graig and Ysgol Talwrn. The subsequent process has brought the matter to this point with the receipt of the report on the objections to the proposal approved by the Executive.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People reported that in order to comply with the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the Schools Organisation Code 2018, the Council published a statutory notice on 18 January, 2021 of its intention to increase the capacity of Ysgol Y Graig to accommodate pupils from Ysgol Talwrn, close Ysgol Talwrn and review the catchment areas of Ysgol Y Graig and Ysgol Talwrn. There followed a 28 day objection period which came to an end on 15 February, 2021. A total of 46 objections to the proposal were received. To comply with the School Organisation Code 2018, the Council as the proposer must publish an objection report describing the objections received; this is presented under Appendix 1. The way in which the Council deals with objections to a statutory notice follows a procedure in accordance with the Code and has been in force since 2013. In accordance with section 5.3 of the Code, local authorities must then decide whether to approve, reject or approve the proposal with modifications. Having considered the objections received during the objection period, it is recommended that the Executive approve the original proposal which is to *increase the capacity of Ysgol Y Graig to accommodate pupils from Ysgol Talwrn, close Ysgol Talwrn and review the catchment areas of Ysgol Y Graig and Ysgol Talwrn.*

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People recapped on the journey to date beginning with the statutory consultation on the future of Ysgol Talwrn and Ysgol Y Graig which Council Officials undertook between 6 February and 20 March, 2020 having been authorised to do so 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. It should be noted that the Council has received a letter from the Welsh Government in confirmation that Ministers are giving the Council an extension until 19 March, 2021 to publish any proposal. The Council has operated in accordance with the School Organisation Code 2018 throughout this process. As part of that consultation, the Council's original proposal and a number of other proposals were considered in detail. The consultation garnered 57 online responses and 10 letter and e-mail responses from individual and community organisations. Other educational models suggested by stakeholders were also assessed by Officers against the criteria and drivers of the current Schools' Modernisation Strategy. After considering all the responses and following a comprehensive analysis of their strengths and weaknesses against the drivers of the Strategy the original proposal was considered the most appropriate way forwards because it was deemed to meet the requirements of the Strategy's key drivers in terms of standards; leadership and management; adequacy of the school building; sufficiency of school places, cost efficiency; Welsh-medium provision and community use. The report at Part B refers to the 12 reasonable alternatives to the closure of Ysgol Talwrn that were considered and assessed but were found not to meet the key drivers of the Schools' Modernisation Strategy nor the challenges faced by the two schools. The proposal which is estimated to cost in the region of £6m will be funded 65:35 by the Welsh Government Band B 21st Century Schools Programme and by the Council through a combination of capital receipts and unsupported borrowing. Based on the calculations outlined in the report, the proposal is affordable. Moreover, the Council considers that it would be unwise not to invest given the increase in the number of children in the area in the past coupled to a projected increase in future as a result of a number of housing developments in the Ysgol Y Graig catchment area. The report also evaluates the impact of the proposal on future generations with regard to the long-term needs of the Island, reduced cost/dependency on the Authority in future; the extent of collaboration with others in the decision; citizen

participation in the decision making process and impact on equality and the Welsh language.

Referring to the Objection Report the Director of Education, Skills and Young People highlighted that the 46 responses received come from a cross-section of stakeholders and many include more than one reasons for objection. These reasons have been grouped into categories as objections based on – standards at Ysgol Talwrn; the pandemic; the Council's constitutional decision-making; potential impact on the community; the Council not listening; potential impact on the Welsh language, impact of the process on mental health; Ysgol Talwrn being treated differently; option of federating; impact on the village eisteddfod; impact on the cylch meithrin; transport and road safety; children's human rights; the way in which the Council has implemented the Well-being Act in the proposal's Impact Assessment; the scheme's costs; the Council's response; class sizes; the size of the expanded school, and the Ysgol Talwrn site. In line with section 49 of the School Standards and Organisation Wales Act 2013, the Objection Report contains a summary of the objections and the Council's response to those objections.

The Executive considered the objections as set out in the report noting the factors and process that had led to this stage. Questions were asked as follows –

- In noting that a range of stakeholders had had an opportunity to contribute during the statutory consultation process the Executive sought clarity on whether the Local Member of Parliament, the Local Member of the Senedd and the regional Members of the Senedd had provided any responses and if so what was their substance.

The Programme, Business Planning and Performance Manager confirmed that a response to the objections has been received from Anglesey's Member of the Senedd highlighting that he had had a discussion with parents at Ysgol Talwrn which had raised practical issues about engaging with the consultation process – specifically with Scrutiny. The Officer clarified that the Authority has since January, 2020 been through a comprehensive process and that it should be noted that the statutory consultation process ended before the implementation of the first lockdown on 23 March, 2020. The Authority has also introduced a protocol for Public Speaking at Scrutiny Committees which was amended in October, 2020 to allow this to be done at virtual meetings. Residents were made aware of this procedure via the Council website and on 11 November, 2020 people were being specifically informed of the protocol. In the time between amending the protocol and the discussion in Scrutiny in December further correspondence took place to let people know about the new process. Subsequently, correspondence from three individuals expressing an interest and asking how to they could speak at the Scrutiny meeting was received and from those three, two then withdrew and one individual did address the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 10 December on behalf of parents and governors of Ysgol Talwrn under the Public Speaking at Scrutiny Committees Protocol.

The Member for the Senedd also raises a point about there being a feeling that the children themselves had not had an opportunity to be part of the process. The Authority has responded by highlighting the opportunity which pupils had to be part of the process and to give their views during the statutory consultation. The Member of the Senedd further points out that the Authority did remind children of their right to express their views under Article 12 of the United Nations' Rights of the Child Convention. The Authority believes that it had undertaken this under arrangements which were also agreed to by the two Head teachers.

A third point raised by the Anglesey Member of the Senedd relates to the Authority not giving sufficient consideration to the alternative options to closing Ysgol Talwrn.

As referred to by the Director of Education, Skills and Young People, the Authority is able to demonstrate that it has considered other alternative options and educational models both as part of the proposal paper and in considering the response to the original proposal.

- The Executive noted that 27 of the objections received are based on standards at Ysgol Talwrn specifically making the point that standards and the level of teaching at Ysgol Talwrn are high and that the school has provided children with a good education. The Executive sought clarity on the reasoning for the proposal on the basis of educational standards.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People in acknowledging that educational standards at Ysgol Talwrn are good and that is a Green category school (a school that is performing well and needs the lowest level of support) advised the moving forwards with the recommendation will mean that pupils are taught in classes where the age range is no more than 2 years and where the school building meets 21st century schools' standards providing exceptional quality for pupils to learn. The expanded Ysgol Y Graig building and site would be fit for purpose in terms of meeting the requirements of the new Curriculum for Wales. More staff in the new expanded Ysgol Y Graig could mean greater variety within the curriculum as well as greater opportunity for a range of extra-curricular experiences. Additionally, as part of its response to the consultation, Estyn commented that the proposal was likely to maintain present standards with regard to education provision and leadership and management for children in the area. Although both schools are currently designated Category A Green schools, the Authority is taking a long term view to ensure that schools are prepared for future challenges; the proposal if implemented would ensure that standards at both schools are not only sustained in the expanded Ysgol Y Graig but that they continue to improve.

- The Executive noted that 24 of the objections received cite the impact of the pandemic particularly with regard to the timing of the consultation. The Executive sought assurance that Welsh Government had given its approval to the continuation of the process in the context of the pandemic.

The Programme, Business Planning and Performance Manager advised that the Authority being mindful that the last twelve months has been a turbulent time for communities has taken as sensitive approach as possible in arriving at this point in the process. The statutory consultation ended on 20 March, 2020 on the last day of school before the first lockdown period after which it became apparent that the Authority would not be able to meet the timescales specified by the School Organisation Code 2018 for publishing a statutory notice of its intentions. It therefore contacted Welsh Government to request a time extension to allow it to do so and Welsh Government confirmed its approval in May, 2020. In June, 2020 Welsh Government issued a minor amendment to the School Organisation Code to enable local authorities to continue with consultation on school organisation matters during the pandemic; this was in view of the fact that although a great deal of learning was taking place online, schools were open from July, 2020 which for the purpose of the amendment counted as a school day. Further amendments were issued in the period from September, 2020 to February, 2021 reinforcing the original amendment and consequently, the Authority is of the view that it has followed the guidance and has proceeded in accordance with the expectations of the amended School Organisation Code.

- The Executive noted that 10 of the objections raise the issue of federating specifically the possibility of federating Ysgol Talwrn with Ysgol Llanbedrgoch and that further this option was included in the consultation report. The Executive sought further clarity as to why this option was not favoured ultimately.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People advised that the proposal paper presented to the Executive in January, 2020 acknowledged federation as a relevant option and the consultation document likewise included federation as an option for consideration. In the consultation report 12 reasonable alternatives to the closure of Ysgol Talwrn were considered and assessed of which 5 involved an element of federation. However as elaborated upon in the table at section 5.2.11 of the consultation document the disadvantages of these options were considered to outweigh the advantages. The Director confirmed that in his professional opinion federating Ysgol Talwrn with any other school does not meet all the challenges which the schools face in future; these include providing sufficient places at Ysgol Y Graig; providing sufficient space to present the Curriculum for Wales; addressing the variation in cost per pupil which for Ysgol Talwrn exceeds the Anglesey average; maintaining the Ysgol Talwrn school building which will still be inadequate to meet future educational needs; sustaining and driving improvements in educational standards in the long-term; ensuring sufficient Head teacher non-contact time and addressing financial aspects. For all these reasons he did not consider federation to be a realistic option in the case of Ysgol Talwrn.

- The Executive noted that 8 of the objections raise transport and road safety concerns in connection with moving Ysgol Talwrn pupils to the proposed expanded Ysgol Y Graig. In acknowledging these concerns, the Executive sought clarity with regard to the current traffic situation on the road from Talwrn to Llangefni and in the event that the proposal is approved, the Executive sought assurances regarding the provision both of safe transport to school for Ysgol Talwrn pupils and adequate parking at the expanded Ysgol Y Graig.

The Head of Highways, Waste and Property Services explained that the current Ysgol Y Graig was designed as a green school to encourage pupils to walk and cycle to school with both walking and cycling routes being provided. It was also designed to provide minimum parking provision in line with Welsh Government policy on promoting walking and cycling. There are however parking issues outside Ysgol Y Graig due to the use of cars to take children to and from school and these issues remain despite efforts to ask parents to park reasonably and to encourage their children to walk or cycle to school. Should the proposal be approved, it would provide an opportunity to improve the current situation and would entail undertaking a traffic impact assessment of the effects of extending the school and assimilating pupils from Ysgol Talwrn; this would then form part of a planning submission incorporating mitigation measures to include provision for a new car park which would need to be approved before the proposal could go ahead.

With regard to the traffic position, an October 2019 survey shows that 17% of Ysgol Talwrn pupils come from the Ysgol Corn Hir catchment area and 31% from the Ysgol Y Graig catchment area which means that 48% of Ysgol Talwrn pupils take the B5109 road from Llangefni to Talwrn daily. Should the proposal be approved they would not have need to make this journey. Whilst 67% of Ysgol Talwrn pupils come from outside the catchment area and are not able to walk or cycle to school only 10 pupils live within half a mile of the school and are likely to walk or cycle to school. It is envisaged that the proposal would involve less movement between Talwrn and Llangefni than currently in the other direction. For Ysgol Talwrn pupils who live in Talwrn transport to school by bus/minibus would be provided in line with the Authority's transport policy as

it would be unreasonable to expect the children to walk from Talwrn to Llangefni. It should also be noted that since the opening of the new Llangefni link road an additional car park close to the Penmynydd Road has been provided by Coleg Menai meaning that students can access the link road without having to pass either the current or proposed expanded Ysgol y Graig sites.

- The Executive noted that 13 of the objections are concerned by the potential impact of the proposal on the Welsh language. The Executive also noted that the Council's impact assessment which will remain a live document suggests that the proposal will have a positive impact on the Welsh language. The Executive sought further assurance regarding the effects on the Welsh language and asked for clarification in respect of how the "live" status of the impact assessment will be maintained.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People said that the number of children speaking fluent Welsh at home is currently higher for Ysgol Y Graig pupils (72%) than for Ysgol Talwrn (40%) which provides the conditions for the language to flourish among children moving to the new expanded school should the proposal be approved. It would be the responsibility of the expanded school's Leadership Team to ensure the development of the language and to ensure that children are provided with as many opportunities as possible to develop their Welsh language skills within school and further, to work with the school community to promote use of the language at home. As at present the school would be expected to promote Welsh within the classroom and on the playing field in accordance with the Authority's Welsh language Charter. Ensuring that the impact assessment remains a live document is an important element of the proposal meaning the assessment document will develop and evolve to reflect the situation going forwards. Prior to lockdown, a project to promote the use of Welsh in local shops had commenced and although it has had to be paused because of the pandemic it will resume in support of the objectives of the Authority's Welsh Language Strategy and Charter within communities to develop the language with children at the expanded school being an integral part. Other schemes linked to the Welsh Language Centres, the Welsh Language Forum and in partnership with Menter Môn as well as the 10 year Welsh Language in Education Strategy are all key elements in developing the language.

The Programme, Business Planning and Performance Manager said that the impact assessment has to be a live document to enable the Authority to regularly ask questions of the community about impacts arising, and if so how they can be addressed by the Authority. As an illustration, a point raised in the objection report relates to the impact of the proposal on the village eisteddfod in Talwrn; the Authority is of the view that if the impact means children from Ysgol Talwrn not taking part, then it should be looking to work with Ysgol Y Graig and its pupils so they can participate in the eisteddfod thereby raising awareness about the eisteddfod among many more children, their parents and among homes which could be a model for the continuation of the eisteddfod into the future. In this way the Authority would be taking steps to mitigate any impact as the scheme develops.

Councillor Ieuan Williams, Portfolio Member for Service Transformation and the Welsh Language said he thought it important that the Council takes as proactive an approach as possible to enabling the village eisteddfod to continue.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People confirmed that the eisteddfod and Welsh culture are important elements within the existing Ysgol Y Graig which is a mind-set that is expected to continue.

In closing remarks the Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, Culture and Youth thanked all the Officers for their preparatory work throughout what has been a comprehensive process. He referred to the key drivers of the Schools' Modernisation Strategy which have provided an anchor to the process, and having considered all the views expressed and feedback along the way and in particular the objections submitted, he did not believe that the situation had changed fundamentally. He welcomed the commitment to promoting the local eisteddfod and to developing the Welsh Language but emphasised that the responsibility for ensuring the language flourishes is not one for schools alone and he urged parents and grandparents to ensure they pass down their Welsh language skills to their children and grandchildren. Difficult decisions sometimes have to be taken and closing a school is one of the most difficult. He proposed the recommendation of the report that the original 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 Y Graig and Ysgol Talwrn be approved. The Executive supported the proposal.

It was resolved to approve the original proposal, namely to increase the capacity of Ysgol Y Graig to accommodate pupils from Ysgol Talwrn, close Ysgol Talwrn and review the catchment areas of Ysgol Y Graig and Ysgol Talwrn.

**Councillor Llinos Medi
Chair**