

# **CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

## **Minutes of the virtual Call-In meeting held on 26 March, 2021**

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

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

Co-opted Members: Mr Keith Roberts (The Catholic Church) Mr Dyfed Wyn Jones (Parent-Governor - Primary Sector)

### **Call-In Request Signatories who are not members of the Committee**

Councillors Kenneth Hughes, R. Llewelyn Jones, Peter Rogers.

### **Portfolio Members**

Councillor Llinos Medi Huws (Leader)  
Councillor R. Meirion Jones (Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, Youth and Culture)  
R. G. Parry, OBE, FRAgS (Portfolio Member for Highways, Waste and Councillor Property)  
Councillor Dafydd Rhys Thomas (Portfolio Member for Corporate Business)  
Councillor Robin Williams (Portfolio Member for Finance)

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Chief Executive  
Deputy Chief Executive  
Head of Function (Resources) and Section 151 Officer  
Director of Education, Skills and Young People  
Head of Highways, Waste and Property Services  
Head of Democratic Services  
Head of Profession (HR) and Transformation  
Business Planning, Programme and Performance Manager  
Legal Services Manager  
Scrutiny Manager (AGD)  
Committee Officer (ATH)

**APOLOGIES:** Mrs Anest G. Frazer (The Church in Wales)

**ALSO PRESENT:** Mr Robat Idris Davies (on behalf of Ysgol Talwrn and community),  
Scrutiny Officer (SR), Mr Gareth Williams (Local Democracy Reporter)

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The Chair welcomed all those present to this meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee convened to consider a call-in request and he outlined the way in which the business of the meeting would be conducted.

## 1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Declarations of interest were made as follows –

Councillor Nicola Roberts declared a personal but not prejudicial interest with regard to item 2 on the agenda as a member of the governing bodies of Ysgol Y Graig and Ysgol Talwrn.

Mr Marc Jones, Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in item 2 on the agenda on account of his father in law's membership of the Governing Body of Ysgol Talwrn.

## 2 CALL-IN OF A DECISION: OBJECTION REPORT – LLANGEFNI AREA SCHOOLS' MODERNISATION YSGOL TALWRN AND YSGOL Y GRAIG

A call-in application had been submitted by Councillors Bryan Owen, R. Llewelyn Jones, Kenneth Hughes, Peter Rogers and Aled Morris Jones with regard to a decision made by the Executive at its meeting held on 15 March, 2021 in relation to the Objection Report in respect of Schools' Modernisation in the Llangefni area with reference to Ysgol Talwrn and Ysgol Y Graig which was *to approve the original proposal, namely to increase the capacity of Ysgol Y Graig to accommodate Ysgol Talwrn, close Ysgol Talwrn and review the catchment areas of Ysgol Y Graig and Ysgol Talwrn*. The Executive's decision notice, the call-in request and the report by the Director of Education, Skills and Young People to the meeting of the Executive on 15 March, 2021 incorporating the Objection Report were presented.

Councillor Bryan Owen as Lead Call-In Member, explained the reasons for calling in the decision made by the Executive on 15 March 2021 as set out in the call-in request form which were as follows –

- The decision is being rushed in a pandemic
- The public feel that they have not had a fair hearing and *the key proposed question being*
- Concern about value for money

Councillor Bryan Owen said that he was making the call-in request on behalf of the parents and Governing Body of Ysgol Talwrn who are concerned about the future of their community should the proposed closure of the village school be confirmed. He referred to the school as being at the heart of community life and rural communities in turn as providing the foundation for the Welsh language to grow and prosper. As such every effort should be made to protect schools in rural communities. The community of Talwrn including parents and governors of Ysgol Talwrn also feel very strongly that the decision is being rushed through at a time when pandemic restrictions have made it difficult for them to respond appropriately. Councillor Owen emphasised that the considerations which led to the postponement of a decision on this matter in June 2020 - namely the need to respond to the crisis and to keep the people of Anglesey safe - still apply thereby raising questions about the justification for proceeding at this time. Councillor Bryan Owen referred to the accuracy of the data used specifically the fact that there are 5 children recorded as being registered for nursery provision when there are in fact 14 children attending the Cylch Meithrin. With regard to value for money Councillor Owen suggested that rather than incur expenditure of £6m on extending Ysgol Y Graig it would make better financial sense were the proposed new Ysgol Corn Hir to be built with sufficient capacity to accommodate the pupil overspill in Llangefni and that Ysgol Talwrn be retained. Neither have details been provided regarding the location of the proposed Ysgol Y Graig extension.

Councillors Kenneth Hughes, R. Llewelyn Jones and Peter Rogers as co-signatories of the call-in request were given the opportunity to speak and they echoed the sentiments of

Councillor Bryan Owen with regard to concerns about the long-lasting effect which closing Ysgol Talwrn could have on the village of Talwrn and its Welsh speaking community. They referred to the lack of clarity in respect of the nursery data and the need for the considerations to include the well-being of future generations putting children at the heart of the decision. They concurred with the view that building sufficient capacity in the new Ysgol Corn Hir would represent a better value for money option than extending Ysgol Y Graig.

Mr Robat Idris Davies spoke on behalf of the community of Talwrn to re-emphasise the community's opposition to the proposed closure of Ysgol Talwrn as conveyed by the 46 objections submitted in response to the publication of the statutory notice of the intention to close the school citing concerns about the impact of the school's closure on the spirit and identity of the village and whether it was right to be considering a matter of such significance in the midst of a pandemic. Mr Davies said that there was no good argument for closing the school which is prospering educationally in a building that is essentially sound and that a sensible option would be to make an application to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Fund to modernise the school. The prevailing feeling in the community is that the Council is not listening and has already made up its mind about the future of Ysgol Talwrn.

The Portfolio Members and Officers present responded at length to the call-in request with reference to the following –

- That as part of the statutory consultation in February/March 2020 the Council's original proposal and a number of other proposals were considered in detail; other educational models suggested by stakeholders were also assessed and 12 reasonable alternatives to the closure of Ysgol Talwrn were considered and assessed including federalisation but were found not to meet the key drivers of the current Schools' Modernisation Strategy nor the challenges facing the two schools.
- That Welsh Government had confirmed in writing that the Council would be allowed an extension until 19 March, 2021 to publish any proposal and that the Council has operated in accordance with the School Organisation Code 2018 throughout this process. The process has taken 16 months and has involved consultation with a range of stakeholders including staff, parents, governors and pupils at the two schools.
- That the impact of the proposal on future generations in relation to the five ways of working has been evaluated (Section F of the report refers) and shows the extent of collaboration in reaching the decision and the involvement of citizens in the decision making process.
- That the Council understands the frustration of stakeholders due to the pandemic situation but believes that it has been considerate and sensitive in dealing with the lockdown period and has given stakeholders sufficient opportunity and time to respond. Welsh Government has published guidelines for local authorities regarding consulting on proposals during the pandemic and these have been followed closely by the Council.
- That the number of objections received to the proposal during the lockdown period at 46 was higher than in the past. Also, more consultation responses were received in 2020 – (57 responses) than in 2018 (52 responses).
- That the Welsh Language Impact Assessment which assessed the potential impact of the proposal on the Welsh language in school and in the community concluded that it would have a positive impact on the language. The Impact Assessment will remain a live document and will be a way of alleviating stakeholder concerns throughout the project.
- That PLASC data 2020 shows that the percentage of pupils who are fluent Welsh speakers at home is higher at Ysgol Y Graig (73%) than at Ysgol Talwrn (40%) which may provide an opportunity for the language to flourish among children who move from Talwrn through greater use with a wider range of children. It would be the responsibility of the Leadership Team of the proposed expanded Ysgol Y Graig to promote the informal use of Welsh by pupils during school hours and the school would be expected to

promote the use of Welsh in the classroom and in the school yard in accordance with Authority's Welsh Language Charter.

- That figures for attendance at the Cylch Meithrin are based on figures which are provided to the Authority regularly each autumn term (the Cylch Meithrin being run independently from the Authority) meaning the data collection process is consistent. This information shows that over the past 5 years the number of children attending the Cylch Meithrin is more or less double the number of children who then attend Ysgol Talwrn's reception class the following year e.g. over the 3 year period from 2016/17 to 2019/20 a total of 34 children have attended the Cylch Meithrin of which 18 have then attended Ysgol Talwrn.
- That Anglesey's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools £36m funding allocation under Band B covers not only Ysgol Talwrn and Ysgol Y Graig in Llangefni but also schools in the Seiriol and Amlwch areas and spending more on one area has a knock on effect in reducing the funding available for the areas remaining. To retain Ysgol Talwrn as well as extending Ysgol Y Graig or building a larger new Ysgol Corn Hir to take surplus Llangefni pupils would increase the cost of the project by approximately £1.4m to allow for the necessary adaptations to Ysgol Talwrn to bring the school to the standards required to enable it to fully deliver the provisions of the new Curriculum.
- That the Council will spend the £36m 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools allocation on the basis that it would be unwise to forego an investment which is 65% funded by Welsh Government; if Anglesey does not use the funding for the benefit of Anglesey then it will be re-allocated to other local authority areas.
- That value for money needs to be considered on the basis of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. In terms of economy, closing Ysgol Talwrn is more economical than keeping it open as the latter would entail an extra £1.4m to bring it up to standard; in terms of efficiency, closing the Ysgol Talwrn would eliminate the current 40% running costs thereby releasing those resources to be used more efficiently for the provision of education. In terms of effectiveness retaining Ysgol Talwrn would not meet any of the financial drivers in the Schools' Modernisation Strategy and would only meet the other drivers at an additional cost of £1.4m making it a less effective option than closing the school.
- That with regard to identifying land for the proposed extension to Ysgol Y Graig, the current school was built to accommodate over 300 pupils with an option to extend on either end to provide two additional classrooms. However, an extra seven classrooms are now required making the original option unfeasible. Using existing land around the school building would lead to the loss of the playing field which would contravene the standards prescribed by Estyn. Using the car park land would exacerbate existing parking issues and is not in any case possible because of storage tanks underneath the car park. The option that is being considered and regarding which discussions are underway is for the acquisition of land nearby on which to build the proposed extension. It would be inappropriate to comment any further until a final decision on the school is confirmed.

Councillor Bryan Owen as the Lead Call-in signatory was given the opportunity to summarise.

Councillor Dylan Rees and Nicola Roberts, Local Members spoke to confirm that they believed the reasons for making the call-in request had been answered and that their own views remained unchanged in terms of supporting the Executive's decision as the most feasible way forward to address the challenge of modernising the primary education provision in this part of Llangefni. Councillor Dylan Rees referred to an Audit Wales report dated November, 2020 which provided an assessment of the Authority's Covid 19 response and recovery and which stated that continuing to deliver key programmes and priority projects within the transformation programme will contribute to the resilience of services.

Councillor R. Meirion Jones, Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, Youth and Culture and Councillor R.G. Parry, OBE, FRAGS Executive Member and Local Member were also given the opportunity to provide their comments.

The Committee considered the information presented both verbally and in writing and those Members who had not signed the call-in request indicated that they were satisfied with the responses provided and were not persuaded to support the call-in.

The Chair said that the Committee has three options in coming to a decision on the call-in, viz.

- To reject the call-in and confirm the Executive's decision
- To reject the Executive's decision and refer it back to the Executive with a recommendation that it be reconsidered and/or amended.
- To reject the Executive's decision and to refer the matter to the Full Council in the knowledge that as the Council has no jurisdiction in this matter it can only refer it back to the Executive.

Councillor Bryan Owen proposed, seconded by Councillor Aled Morris Jones that the decision be referred back to the Executive for re-consideration with the recommendation that Ysgol Talwrn remain open. Councillor Richard Owain Jones proposed an amendment that the call-in be rejected and that the Executive's decision be endorsed, and was seconded by Councillor Alun Roberts. In the ensuing vote the amendment was carried by 10 votes to 2.

**It was resolved to reject the call-in and to endorse the Executive's decision from its meeting held on 15 March, 2021 which was to approve the original proposal, namely to increase the capacity of Ysgol Y Graig to accommodate Ysgol Talwrn, close Ysgol Talwrn and review the catchment areas of Ysgol Y Graig and Ysgol Talwrn.**

*The Executive's decision of the 15 March, 2021 therefore takes effect forthwith.*

**Councillor Aled Morris Jones**  
**Chair**