

AGENDA ITEM 2

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

17th MARCH 2016

IMPROVING PRIMARY EDUCATION PROVISION IN FERNDALE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING IN DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING (COUNCILLOR MRS E HANAGAN)

**Authors: Chris Bradshaw, Director of Education and Lifelong Learning
Tel: 01443 744001 and Julie Hadley, School Organisation Manager Tel:
01443 744227.**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to advise Members of the outcome of the recent publication of a statutory notice in respect of a proposal to close Ferndale Infants' School and transfer its pupils to Darran Park Primary School, subject to parental preference, in September, 2016. Work to improve the facilities at Darran Park Primary will be undertaken during the forthcoming summer holidays.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note that several objections were received in response to the publication of the statutory notice to progress this proposal. An Objections Report, which summarises the objections received and the Council's response to them is attached to this report, as Appendix 1;
- 2.2 Agree to implement the proposal to close Ferndale Infants' School and transfer its pupils to Darran Park Primary School, subject to parental preference, in September, 2016, noting that works to improve and extend the site and buildings of Darran Park Primary will be undertaken prior to this date.

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To implement the proposal in accordance with the process outlined in Welsh Government legislative guidance (the School Organisation Code).

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Members will recall that, at the meeting of Cabinet held on 7th January 2016, approval was given to publish a statutory notice to progress the proposal to close Ferndale Infants' School and transfer its pupils to Darran Park Primary School, subject to parental preference, in September, 2016. Work to undertake improvements to the site and facilities at Darran Park Primary, which will include additional classroom accommodation will commence in the near future, with the majority of such work being undertaken during the forthcoming school summer holidays.

5 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Equality and Community Impact Assessments were prepared in respect of this proposal and were published on the Council's website together with the consultation document that outlined the proposal in detail. Copies of both reports have been provided to Cabinet previously.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The consultation process in respect of this proposal was undertaken under the arrangements outlined in the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code, which was introduced on 1st October 2013. Consultation took place between 2nd November 2015 and 31st December 2015 and full details of this process was published in a Consultation Report, which was presented at the meeting of Cabinet held on 7th January and subsequently published on the Council website.

7. THE STATUTORY PROCESS

- 7.1 The statutory notice for this proposal was published on 29th January 2016 and a 28 day period, to 29th February 2016 was allowed for the receipt of objections, in line with legislation. This period was extended slightly to account for the half term holiday and school Inset days. Several objections have been received, these are summarised and appropriately responded to in the Objections Report, that is attached at Appendix 1. It must be noted that the objections received are in essence the same issues that were raised during consultation, which

have already been responded to in the Consultation Report that was published on 25th January 2016.

- 7.2 Subject to a decision by Cabinet to approve the proposals, the Council will have to publish the attached Draft Objections Report. Publication must be undertaken within 7 days of a Cabinet decision to approve the proposals.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 This proposal to close Ferndale Infants' and transfer its pupils to Darran Park Primary School will realise annual revenue savings of £143,000. In closing a school, redundancy costs may arise, as the number of staff required in the replacement school may be less than for the separate schools. The Council seeks to minimise this cost by redeploying displaced members of staff wherever possible. Therefore, it is not possible at this point in the process to identify any possible redundancy costs.

- 8.2 Building improvements will be made to the site and building of Darran Park Primary School, to improve the accommodation and facilities of this school. It is estimated that the cost of this work will be approximately £400K and will be funded by the Council from within its existing capital resources. It must be noted that Darran Park is the 'associated' school to Ferndale Infants' and is the school that the Ferndale pupils would ordinarily transfer to for their education at Key Stage 2. The schools are located just 0.4 miles apart and there are no associated additional transport costs as a result.

9 LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ SIP.

- 9.1 This particular proposal forms part of the larger school reorganisation proposals that form our 21st Century Schools Programme for Rhondda Cynon Taf.

10 CONCLUSION

- 10.1 Members are asked to formally approve the proposal as consulted upon and agree to close Ferndale Infants' School and transfer its pupils to Darran Park Primary School, subject to parental preference, on 1st September 2016.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee:
Children and Young People

Appendices to the report are:

- *Objections Report*

Contact Officer

Julie Hadley, School Organisation Manager
01443 744227

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

17th MARCH 2016

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG
LEARNING IN DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR
EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING (COUNCILLOR MRS E HANAGAN)**

Item: IMPROVING PRIMARY EDUCATION PROVISION IN FERNDALE

Background Papers

- Cabinet meeting - 7th January 2016.

Officer to contact:
Julie Hadley, School Organisation Manager
01443 744227

This page is left Blank.

APPENDIX 1**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL****PROPOSAL TO CLOSE FERNDALE INFANTS' SCHOOL****OBJECTIONS REPORT****1. Purpose of the Objections Report**

This report is prepared in accordance with the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code, statutory document 006/2013. Its purpose is to:

- Inform the outcome of the publication of the statutory notice published for this proposal, which was published on 29th January 2016 for a period of 28 days; and
- Detail all objections received and the local authority's response to them.

2. The Statutory Notice

The statutory notice to progress this proposal, which was published on 29th January 2016 is reproduced below:

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
Education Directorate, Ty Trevithick, Abercynon CF45 4UQ

Notice is given in accordance with section 43 of the School Standards and Organisation Act 2013 and the School Organisation Code that Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC), having consulted such persons as required, propose to discontinue Ferndale Infants' School, North Road, Ferndale CF43 4PS. The school is currently maintained by RCTCBC.

RCTCBC undertook a period of consultation before deciding to publish this proposal. A consultation report containing a summary of the issues raised by consultees, the proposer's responses and the views of Estyn is available on RCTCBC's website at <http://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/GetInvolved/Consultations/Schoolconsultations.aspx>

It is proposed to implement the proposals on 1st September 2016.

It is proposed that pupils currently attending Ferndale Infants' School will transfer to Darran Park Primary School, on 1st September 2016, subject to parental preference. This school is an English Medium Community Primary School. No interim arrangements will be required as the school will be ready to receive the pupils on the aforementioned date. Building works to remodel and reconfigure the school, to improve the facilities for all pupils will however be undertaken.

Pupils will be provided with transport in accordance with RCTCBC's Transport Policy. From September 2016, RCTCBC will provide free transport for pupils who attend their relevant Primary, Infant or Junior School, if they reside beyond 2 miles walking distance to that school, or if the walking route is not deemed to be available. The relevant school is the catchment school or the nearest school. It must be noted that no address within the catchment area of Darran Park Primary School, which incorporates that of Ferndale Infants' School will be more than 2 miles from the school.

Within a period of 28 days after the publication of these proposals, that is to say by 29th February 2016 any person may object to the proposals. Objections should be sent to the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, School Planning Section, Ty Trevithick, Abercynon, Mountain Ash CF45 4UQ, e-mail schoolplanning@rctednet.net.



Signed: _____

Chris Bradshaw
Chief Executive
For Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Date: 29th January 2016

Explanatory Note of the Proposals

It is proposed to close Ferndale Infants' School on 1st September 2016, with its pupils transferring to Darran Park Primary School on this date, subject to parental preference. Although Darran Park Primary has sufficient classroom capacity to accommodate all Ferndale Infants' pupils at the present time, remodelling and refurbishment works will be undertaken to improve the school's facilities for the benefit of all pupils who will attend in the future.

Children residing in the Blaenllechau area receive free transportation at the present time, as the walking route to Darran Park Primary from this area is not considered to be an available route. This provision will continue for the foreseeable future.

3. Details of Objections Received

- A total of 8 objections were received by the published closing time and date, namely 5pm on 29th January 2016. They consisted of 8 letters and e-mails, from:

5 parents
A grandparent
2 Assembly Members for South Wales Central

4. The Objections and our Responses.

- **Concerns at the impact of additional traffic and its associated risks**

Traffic impact assessments will be undertaken if required as part of any planning application that may be submitted; in addition they may be undertaken as part of other initiatives that may be considered, such as Safe Routes to Schools. There has been no change to the catchment area of Darran Park Primary School as a result of this proposal; all the pupils that reside within the catchment area live within 1.1 miles of Darran Park, which is considered to be well within the suitable walking distance for primary aged pupils as recognised by Welsh Government in its Learner Travel Measure (other than the pupils that reside in Blaenllechau who are and will continue to be provided with a free bus for safety reasons).

- **The kitchen facilities at Darran Park cannot cope with the number of children requiring meals, food runs out, children are being rushed to eat their food, also children having packed lunches are forced to eat outside as there is no room for them in the dining hall.**

These statements are incorrect. The kitchen facilities at Darran Park are more than adequate to provide meals for all children who require them and there are no documented reports of children being refused meals due to the food running out. The size of the school hall complies with that required for a school of this number of pupils as defined in the DFES guidance document Building Bulletin 99. The initiative which allows children to eat their packed lunches outside when weather permits was introduced in the summer as a 'treat' for the children, which has proved very popular; it is a voluntary arrangement that no child is forced to do. All children that choose to eat outside are supervised by school staff. It must also be noted that, prior to commencement of the consultation process on this proposal, there were no records of any complaints being received in respect of any aspect of the school meal provision at Darran Park Primary School.

- **Using the Astroturf in the park as a playground poses a risk to the pupils.**

It is not intended that this facility be used as an additional playground as this provision is not required. The Astroturf is currently used by Darran Park Primary (and neighbouring YGG Llyn y Forwyn) during the day as and when required and for

activities that are supervised by school staff. What is being proposed is that the two schools be formally given exclusive use of the facility during the school day (at present it can be booked for use by outside organisations) and that access to the facility from Darran Park Primary be improved and made more secure. It is, in essence simply formalising and improving the arrangements for the usage that is currently made.

- **The park will no longer be available to the public to use.**

This is not correct, our proposals for the park relate to the school usage of the Astroturf only and details of this are explained in the previous response.

- **The free bus from Blaenllechau is being withdrawn/charges are to be introduced**

This bus is provided by the Council due to the nature of the walking route and there are no plans at the present time to either withdraw it or introduce charges for it.

- **What are the plans for the building work at Darran Park? I have heard that this is no longer going ahead.**

Our ideas in this regard were displayed at the consultation event held on 8/12/15, but it was made clear that no firm plans had been agreed as no decision on this proposal has yet been made. The work required will be discussed with the Governing Body of Darran Park Primary School and the proposed changes confirmed once a decision has been taken on the future of the two schools. Building work will commence as soon as possible, with the majority of it being undertaken during the summer holidays.

- **There is insufficient capacity at Darran Park to cater for the additional pupils.**

As indicated above and in our consultation document, we will be undertaking work to remodel the premises at Darran Park and will ensure that the school has sufficient places to cater for all pupils resident in the catchment area who may require one in the future.

- **172 houses are being constructed on the site of the former Chubb factory; you have not taken these in to account.**

This planning application has only just been received and has not yet been determined. The site is a former industrial estate which is not in the catchment area of any school at present. It is closer to Maerdy Primary School than Darran Park so should this development proceed, it will be placed in to the Maerdy catchment area, as this school has sufficient surplus capacity to accommodate any pupils who may reside there.

- **What plans do you have for the future use of the Ferndale Infants' building?**

As with the response to the previous question, no consideration has yet been given to this as no decision has yet been made on the future of the school.

- **Classes will be too big, possibly 40+ children.**

Class size legislation will be adhered to, ie no more than 30 per class for the Foundation Phase, with this figure being a recommended guideline for Key Stage 2.

- **Children's education is not paramount, this is a financially orientated decision.**

This statement is incorrect. The reasons for the consideration of this proposal and the rationale behind it are outlined in detail in the consultation report that was widely circulated in November 2015 and which is still available on the Council website for any person to view.

- **The consultation undertaken with the pupils of Ferndale Infants was flawed; parents were not aware of it and the majority of the pupils consulted with were in Year 2, these children are due to transfer to Darran Park in September in any case.**

Details of all consultation meetings that were organised, including those with the two School Councils were published in our consultation document, which was circulated to all parents. The composition of the School Council is determined by the school; it should also be noted that the Headteacher was in attendance at the meeting held at Ferndale Infants to support and assist her pupils.

- **Pupil data and statistics provided in the consultation document are incorrect, based on information recently supplied to parents by the Council.**

The information provided in our consultation document consists of published data derived from the 2015 PLASC return and forecasts produced using recognised methodology that is in common with that used by other local authorities in Wales. We consider that our data is as accurate as it is possible to provide. The 2016 information has only recently been received and it obviously could not be included in the consultation document that was produced in November, two months prior to the date of the data capture in January 2016.

- **What will the pupil : staff ratios be at Darran Park? Also comments made regarding the excellent education provision at Ferndale Infants' School at the present time, which is perceived as being better than the provision at Darran Park. Further comment also made that the categorisation of Ferndale Infants is incorrect.**

The decisions on the staffing ratios at Darran Park will be taken by the school's governing body at the appropriate time; governors will be mindful of legislation, the needs of the children and their budget when making such decisions. No criticism of the education provision at Ferndale Infants' has been made and it has been noted that the school is now categorised as a 'yellow' school with regard to the level of support it requires (it was 'amber' when the consultation was undertaken last year). However, Darran Park has recently been categorised as a 'green' school, which is the highest level it can achieve, this rating indicates that the school has a track record of sustaining a high level of learner outcomes, it demonstrates resilience at all levels and is challenged to move forward towards, or sustaining excellence.

- **Ferndale Infants School offers full time Nursery provision; Darran Park provides part time places only.**

All schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf receive funding for part time nursery places for any pupils admitted after September 2015. Some school governing bodies have continued to provide full time places if their budget allows them to do so and this is the case at Ferndale Infants at the present time. However, information provided by all Headteachers in respect of their intentions for nursery provision from September 2016 indicates that Ferndale Infants will provide part time places only from that date should these proposals not be approved.

- **We have received no assurances that our children will be transferred with any special process or care.**

A programme of transition will be put in place to ensure that children are well prepared for any transfer. This transition process is undertaken every year between the two schools and is now well developed.

- **One has no confidence in unelected quangos making life changing decisions on my child's behalf.**

The Council is a democratically elected public body, not an unelected quango.

5. Conclusion

(to be inserted following decision of Cabinet)