



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 31 July 2019 at 9.30 am at the Council Chamber, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale, Tonypany, CF40 2XX.

County Borough Councillors - Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor M Adams (Chair)

Councillor S Evans	Councillor J Bonetto
Councillor P Jarman	Councillor J Harries
Councillor J Brencher	Councillor E Stephens
Councillor L Walker	Councillor G Caple
Councillor M Griffiths	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor R Lewis	

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr K Wilhite, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

Officers in attendance:-

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr A Wilkins, Director of Legal Services
Mr C Bradshaw, Chief Executive
Mr P Mee, Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services
Ms A Richards, Head of 21st Century Schools
Mr R Waters, Service Director – Frontline Services

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor J Rosser, Councillor G Hopkins, Councillor S Belzak, Councillor R Bevan, Councillor A Cox, Councillor J Cullwick, Councillor H Fychan, Councillor E Griffiths, Councillor L Hooper, Councillor M Fidler Jones and Councillor M Powell

6 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from County Borough Councillors H. Boggis, W. Jones and D. Macey. An apology was also received from CO- Opted Members Mr J Fish and Mr C. Jones (GMB)

7 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, the following declarations were made pertaining to the agenda:-

1. County Borough Councillor J Rosser declared the following personal interest in respect of the matter- "I am Board Member of Coleg Y Cymoedd"
2. County Borough Councillor J Brencher declared the following personal interest in respect of the matter – "I taught at Pontypridd High and I am a Governor at

Coedylan Primary School”

3. County Borough Councillor J Bonetto declared the following personal interest in respect of the matter – “I am on the Governing Body of Hawthorn High”
4. County Borough Councillor E M Griffiths declared the following personal interest in respect of the matter – “Trustee of Cylch Meithrin Evan James and parent of a child in YGG Evan James”
5. County Borough Councillor S Belzak declared the following personal interest in respect of the matter – “ I am a Governor of Cilfynydd Primary & YGG Pont Sion Norton”.
6. County Borough Councillor M Powell declared the following personal interest in respect of the matter – “I am on the Governing Body of Hawthorn High School”
7. County Borough Councillor H Fychan declared the following personal interest in respect of the matter – “Personol – Llywodraethwraig YGG Evan James”
8. County Borough Councillor L Hooper declared the following personal interest in respect of the matter – “A member of my family attends one of the schools mentioned in the report”
9. Mr C Bradshaw declared the following personal interest in respect of the matter – “I was appointed at the Council’s 22nd AGM (17th May 2017) to the Board of Governors – Coleg Morganwg (now Coleg Y Cymoedd) for a 4 year term”

8 Report of the Service Director of Democratic Services & Communications

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications presented the report which included details of the two valid call-in forms which had been received in the names of the three signatories for each call-in, following the Cabinet decision taken on the 18th July 2019 relating to the 21st Century Schools Programme – Proposals to reorganise Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and Sixth Form provision in the Greater Pontypridd Area. Elected Members and those present were referred to section 4.1 within the report which set out the procedure for the call-in meeting

The Service Director advised that each of the call-in signatories would address Committee outlining the reasons given by them in requesting the call-in (copies attached at Appendix D (i) and (ii) to the report). Relevant Officers and Cabinet Members would then be afforded the opportunity to respond to the points raised. It was confirmed that one of the nominated signatories from each call-in would have the right to make their final address to the Committee immediately before a vote is taken on whether, or not, to refer the matter back to Cabinet for reconsideration. It was pointed out that should a decision be taken that the matter not be referred back, then the Cabinet decision of 18th July 2019 would take immediate effect, at the conclusion of the meeting. This process would be repeated for the second call-in and it will be for the Director of Legal Services to clarify and summarise the outcome on both occasions.

The Service Director also confirmed that the Co-opted Member present was not eligible to vote on the matter under consideration.

CALL-IN 1

Councillor M Powell

Councillor M Powell confirmed that on behalf of the three signatories to the first call-in he would also be making the final address to Committee.

Councillor Powell referred to comments he said were made by the Director of Education & Inclusion at the Cabinet meeting on the 18th July 2019, which inferred that the Council is funding one whole school in the area, at £4 million per year and this at a cost to the public for nothing in return. Councillor Powell asked when this information would have become apparent to the Director as there is no mention of this in the report. He reiterated that this cost would bring no benefit to pupils.

Councillor Powell queried the 785 secondary surplus spaces in the greater Pontypridd area and sought clarification on the catchment areas of 'Greater Pontypridd', did it include Abercynon or Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School, Beddau? Councillor Powell also questioned how 21st Century Schools funding is being spent and how money is being 'squandered' as there is no mention of the £4 million in the report, potentially £16 million over the course of three years, which in his opinion could be better spent elsewhere. He urged Members to refer the matter back to Cabinet to address this point otherwise how can the Council look to Welsh Government and expect them to support the spend to provide a surplus high school when the Council is squandering this level of money every year and surely it won't be possible to guarantee Welsh Government's contribution to support the surplus school.

In conclusion Councillor Powell stated that personally, he would not be able to face his constituents knowing the Council is spending this amount of money at no benefit to the public.

Councillor M Fidler Jones

Councillor M Fidler Jones extended his gratitude to all those present at the meeting today.

He stated that the role of Scrutiny is to act as a 'critical friend' to the Council and as the proposals have changed since Scrutiny first had the opportunity to consider them he questioned whether the proposals have undergone proper scrutiny. He added that there has been a lack of scrutiny over the proposals since the initial consultation period.

Councillor Fidler Jones considered that the consultation process, which had generated 2,000 responses, had not been the most engaging. During the statutory process, 348 responses were received from a residents' group who had created a website designed to assist residents as some were having difficulty engaging with the democratic process. Councillor Fidler Jones felt there had been a huge disconnect with members of the public and he pointed out that these particular responses had been dealt with differently in the report, this had personally caused him upset. The Councillor took the opportunity to thank the group for driving this forward.

In conclusion, Councillor Fidler Jones stated that he was not convinced that the proposals have undergone the level of scrutiny they deserve. He urged

members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to discharge their role properly and refer the matter back to the Cabinet for reconsideration.

Councillor H Fychan

Councillor H Fychan thanked Committee for the opportunity to address Members in respect of the matter.

Councillor H Fychan explained that discussing this matter was a cause of sadness to her as despite the hundreds of responses received in respect of the consultation process, the Cabinet seems to have ignored them and she urged them to reconsider. She stressed that the removal of Welsh Medium opportunities from low income families and those without transport in areas such as Ynysybwl, Glyncoch and Cilfynydd will have a negative impact on, not only the children and their communities but on the growth of the Welsh Language. Councillor Fychan referenced pages 189, 206-209 and 211 of the report and stated that the new Welsh medium school on the site of Heol Y Celyn, contrary to the report, would not be able to offer a choice for parents.

Councillor Fychan referred Members to page 215 of the report which outlined the transport arrangements and pointed out that primary aged pupils will have an increased travel time to the new site from Ynysybwl, Glyncoch and Cilfynydd and transport is only offered for official school times so they would miss out on breakfast and after-school clubs. The Councillor raised her concerns that although those living nearby will benefit from the new facility, those families living further afield will no longer be able to access community resources/breakfast clubs which could lead to social deprivation which has not been recognised or addressed in the report.

Councillor Fychan urged more scrutiny and further consideration of the Welsh medium education aspect, and proposed the following:-

1. The equality impact assessments in the Pontypridd, Cilfynydd and Ynysybwl areas are revisited;
2. That consideration is given to other, more appropriate locations for the new school especially in Glyncoch. There are currently 3 sites in Pontypridd; Heol-Y-Celyn, YGG Evan James and Pont Sion Norton, another option should be considered if Pont Sion Norton closes, Heol-Y-Celyn should remain open and a new school located in Ynysybwl/Glyncoch;
3. The Council should reconsider the catchment areas in Pontypridd and full consideration should be given by Cabinet to the capacity of schools which are splitting the communities.

In conclusion Councillor Fychan stated that Welsh Medium Education could be ruined if these proposals are not reconsidered.

Following the address made by the three signatories, the Chair referred to a written representation he had received from the Local Member for Ynysybwl Councillor S Pickering. The representation raised concerns on behalf of parents in her ward regarding the proposals for YGG Pont Sion Norton.

The Chair then called upon the Head of 21st Century Schools, the Cabinet Members for Education & Inclusion Services and for Adult Community Services & Welsh Language, to respond to the issues raised.

The Head of 21st Century Schools clarified the following points:-

Surplus Spaces

Paragraph 4.11 of the Cabinet Report, explains that based on current projections if no changes are made in the Greater Pontypridd area that in 2023 there will be 785 surplus places.

As a result of the capital works that would be carried out to facilitate the changes, and the physical remodelling and improvements that would be made to some of the existing school buildings, the school sites would be rationalised. Capacity would be significantly reduced to keep only approximately 10% surplus capacity, the recommended surplus in good practice of school organisation recommended by WG and this allows places for parental choice and growth, and better use made of existing underutilised capacity to provide much needed hubs for community facilities and learning.

The officers clarified that the 785 secondary school places did not include Abercynon as this is in Mountain Ash Comprehensive School catchment or Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School.

In answer to the comment will Welsh Government support our strategic bid for funding the Officer answered 'yes'.

The Officer was unaware of the origin of the unsubstantiated £4 million figure as quoted by Councillor Powell. The Head of 21st Century Schools felt that the Cabinet report had addressed the key issues raised by the three signatories to the call-in.

Scrutiny

The Head of 21st Century Schools advised that for the first time, in the 21st Century Schools Programme consultation process, scrutiny was involved with these proposals. In December 2018, Members were provided with the opportunity to scrutinise the proposals, and the subsequent decision of Cabinet, which considered the feedback of scrutiny, alongside the responses received through the consultation, was called-in and considered previously by this committee in April 2019. She also clarified that engagement with Scrutiny is over and above the requirements of the first edition of the School Organisation Code.

The Officer confirmed that the consultation and objection methodology undertaken for these proposals was in compliance with the School Organisation Code. The public meetings held, as well as the meetings held with staff, governors and school council members were not a statutory requirement of the Code, but organised to provide a further opportunity for consultees to make their views known.

The Officer also pointed out that no correspondence or feedback had been received from members of the public stating that they had any difficulty in submitting comments during either the consultation or objection period. Also, the number of objections received via a website was noted in the objection report which provided a narrative on the types of objections received, in addition to these objections 3 petitions were also referenced. The Officer stressed that the objections received from 2 of the governing bodies and from 'Our Children First' were included in their entirety as an appendix to the Report for transparency, and that any suggestion that these objections were separated out to deride the validity of them is not true. She pointed out that each objection had been clearly

counted as a valid objection within the Report, and Cabinet Members were given the opportunity to inspect each objection received in its entirety prior to the Cabinet meeting.

The Head of 21st Century Schools also added that the consultation period ran for 108 days, beyond the 42 days required as the minimum standard which was testament to the Council's view on the importance of stakeholder engagement and consultation.

Welsh Medium Education

The Head of 21st Century Schools confirmed that the proposed new school would be fully accessible and inclusive with sports and play facilities together with wider Community facilities that would enhance the wellbeing of children in these communities, and as such would provide more opportunities and increase social inclusion. She acknowledged that children living in Cilfynydd who are within walking distance of YGG PSN, will no longer be within walking distance of the new school and so will qualify for home to school transport to the new school. She advised that this impact is referenced within the Equality Impact Assessment.

The Head of 21st Century schools clarified that provision of after-school activities and breakfast clubs are the responsibility of the individual schools' Governing Bodies and that the Council would encourage the new schools to operate these important services despite the provision of pre and post school activities not being a statutory requirement. She added that it is common for learners accessing Welsh medium education to be transported to and from school, and access to before/after school activities is a challenge across all English and Welsh medium settings in the County Borough, including the existing 60% of learners attending Pont Sion Norton currently accessing school transport. She stressed that these proposals for Welsh medium education are no different to the current provision in this regard.

The Officer added that the families of the 60% of pupils that currently attend YGG PSN on school transport manage this situation currently. In emergency situations school staff have a legal 'duty of care' and if a child is unwell they will care for the child until the responsibility is handed back to the parent.

The Head of 21st Century Schools advised that parents who currently live in Ynysybwl and Glyncoch, who currently travel to YGG PSN, already have to catch 2 services buses to get there. She confirmed that there is a direct service bus from Glyncoch to Rhydyfelin which operates every 20 minutes, so locating the new school in Rhydyfelin would improve the situation for some parents that have to rely on public transport.

The Head of 21st Century Schools reported that the catchment areas are regionalised and are regularly reviewed to ensure that adequate provision of school places is provided in the right areas.

The Cabinet Member for Education & Inclusion Services described RCT as being a front runner in delivering the curriculum and raising standards across Wales, it also has an excellent track record of securing schools funding and delivering school improvement programmes. She described the current 6th form provision as unsustainable and the proposals offer enhanced choices post 16. The Cabinet Member dismissed the suggestions that there had been a lack of

scrutiny associated with the process or that any objections had been separated or downplayed. The Cabinet Member reminded Members that the consultation process had exceeded the statutory requirement by holding public meetings and engaging in the Council's Scrutiny process which had been open to other Members to attend.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Community Services & Welsh Language confirmed that there had been ample opportunity for these matters to be scrutinised in addition to two Cabinet meetings and the two Call-in meetings.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Community Services & Welsh Language addressed the issue of Welsh Medium Education and stated that as a result of the proposals, there would be an increase in the availability of education opportunities through the medium of the Welsh language. Considerable resource has been invested by the Council to ensure the quality of Welsh Medium Education has improved together with increased capacity and growth of the Welsh language.

The Cabinet Member confirmed that the Home to School transport arrangements to YGG Pont Sion Norton have been debated on numerous occasions and pupils would qualify for transport in line with the Council's Learner Travel Policy. In conclusion, the Cabinet Member stressed that the Council's priority for many years has been to provide the very best education for the children of Rhondda Cynon Taf

Having heard the comments of the signatories to the Call-in and the responses of the Head of 21st Century Schools as well as the Cabinet Member for Education & Inclusion Services and the Cabinet Member for Adult Community Services & Welsh Language, the Chair then invited members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to comment on any of the points raised.

The Chair clarified that Committee would consider the three reasons under the Call-in together rather than separately before considering those reasons for the second Call-in. This would keep the process clear and concise for all those present.

The Head of 21st Century Schools emphasised that the school reorganisation proposals would reduce the number of surplus spaces to within 10% to enable school accommodation to be used to the best effect.

A Member of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee raised concerns regarding whether the number of objections had been reduced to 400, out of the 3,000 received in total and questioned what changes had been made based on those objections. In addition, the Member questioned whether the target of 1 million Welsh speakers from across all backgrounds in RCT was still on track and queried whether the most disadvantaged families may be hindered from accessing the extracurricular activities.

In response the Head of 21st Century Schools reported that 435 objections had been received at the objection stage, at the consultation stage in the region of 3,000 responses were received, and in total, approximately 10,000 people had been engaged with during the process.

Another Member of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee also raised a query in respect of the location of the surplus spaces, whether they are solely in the

Pontypridd area or extend into the Cynon Valley. The Member also queried whether the Central South Consortium had been consulted.

The Head of 21st Century Schools confirmed that the surplus spaces referred to are within the greater Pontypridd area and do not extend to the Cynon valley, and in respect of the Central South Consortium, they had been consulted as a Statutory Consultee but had not responded. The Chief Executive also reminded the Committee that the core function of the Central South Consortium is to lead on school improvement across the Central South region.

In response to a query regarding whether certain land in the Glyncoch area had been considered as a potential location for a new school which could reduce the travel time for pupils, it was clarified that a review would be undertaken in that particular area in the future and that this suggested area of land, whilst noted as part of the consultation feedback received, was not under consideration for these proposals.

A Committee Member acknowledged that they had been fully engaged in the scrutiny process to date although pointed out that unlike the Cabinet, they had not had sight of the objections and felt they were unable to make an informed judgement without having sight of them. Under the Council's Standing Orders the Member requested that the complete suite of information is provided to Committee to enable them to carry out their scrutiny role efficiently. Furthermore, the Member urged that consideration be given to the fact that under the proposal, children as young as 3 years old will be travelling a number of hours to school over several miles every day, 60% of these pupils are resident in Glyncoch/Ynysybwl and Coed Y Cwm. This seemed to be contrary to the Council's priorities within the Corporate Plan which encourages a healthier lifestyle and promotes walking and cycling to school.

The Head of 21st Century Schools confirmed that all the objections had been summarised within the report and given equal measure. The Officer stated that no child within RCT travels 2-3 hours to school per day, although children as young as 3 years old do currently travel to school throughout the County Borough. With reference to the management of school places it is a case of supply and demand as without the demand the local authority cannot afford to build in surplus spaces or develop a business case to fund a new school.

The Service Director, Democratic Services & Communications confirmed that the Cabinet considered all responses and objections on an individual basis and had a request been submitted prior to today's meeting by any Committee Member, the relevant information would have been made available to them.

The Member suggested that if this was a Cabinet meeting information would have been readily provided.

Further to another Member's comments, it was confirmed that none of the proposals had changed as a result of the objections made.

A Member of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee felt that the issue of pupil movements had been fully clarified at today's meeting likewise at the Call-In meeting held in April when it was resolved not to refer the matter back to Cabinet. A second Member agreed that all issues had been addressed appropriately and a full and frank discussion had shown that the proposals meet the 21st Century School requirements.

A point in respect of access to after school club and breakfast club provision at the new Welsh school was raised amid fears that pupils may be disadvantaged if they are unable to attend these provisions. The Head of 21st Century Schools dismissed the idea that any child would be disadvantaged and stressed that the local authority supports any school that wishes to provide these pre and post school activities should the Governing Body wish to have them in place. She reminded Committee that these facilities are not a statutory provision, however, the Council will work alongside the Governing Body of the new school to develop these arrangements and fully supports the setup of such provision.

The Co-opted Member present asked for further clarity on a number of points as follows:-

- The scrutiny process and specifically whether the meeting times to date had been flexible enough to accommodate working families in view of the absence of public speakers today;
- The document before Committee is a large document, containing over 250 pages, presenting Members with a lot of information to comprehend in the space of one week, potentially restricting proper scrutiny (it was pointed out that the weeks' notice had met the Council's statutory requirement)
- Concern over the issue of 6th form provision not being adequately addressed - the Co-opted Member stated that 6th form provision within a school offers students a nurturing environment which can be likened to the environments offered within such Universities as Oxford and Cambridge.

(At this stage the Chair reminded Committee that any comments should be referred through the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee and not directed at individual Members).

The Service Director, Democratic Services and Communications stated that the Cabinet had considered the matter in September 2018 with continued ongoing engagement sessions between Cabinet Members and Chairs of Scrutiny to follow. The proposals had been discussed at length during the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee in December 2018 (held at 5pm) and is part of its ongoing work programme so in essence this was not an isolated scrutiny meeting. At the Call-In meeting held on the 3rd April 2019 the Council's public engagement policy was utilised to assist the three public speakers who attended and addressed Committee. These points were supported by the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The Head of 21st Century Schools stated that the retention rates for 6th form students are very low and pupils are exercising their choice and currently electing to attend college where the pastoral care and support is excellent.

The Chair thanked the Members and Officers for their contributions and asked Councillor Powell to sum up the argument in favour of referring the Cabinet decision back to Cabinet for reconsideration.

Councillor Powell questioned the adequacy of the pastoral care at Coleg Y Cymoedd. He addressed the issue of removing spaces in schools and pointed

out that when numbers are cut, it hinders the school from functioning properly due to insufficient funds. He reminded Members that the Council has closed and amalgamated three schools in Aberdare with 6th form provision, which in his opinion dismisses the argument of losing funding. He stated that in his opinion the consultation has changed, pointing out that the Gwauncelyn catchment change had been removed from the consultation documents, and he also agreed with his fellow Members that not providing the additional information at the meeting was hindering the scrutiny process.

Councillor Powell urged the Council to 'up its game' in respect of Welsh medium education in RCT and questioned how the Council was increasing the number of Welsh medium education pupils. He considered the site for the new school as discriminating against the Welsh Medium education due to the distance and time to reach it, particularly from Ynysybwl. He advised Committee that the traffic through Pontypridd is so slow that pupils will need a packed breakfast to eat on the bus each morning as they won't arrive at school on time. He urged Committee to undertake proper scrutiny of the proposals by calling in the decision.

Following consideration of the issues and in accordance with the Overview & Scrutiny Procedure Rules, it was **RESOLVED** that the matter not be referred back to Cabinet for reconsideration and the Cabinet decision taken on the 18th July 2019 take effect as from the close of the meeting. The decision was summarised by the Director for Legal Services.

CALL-IN 2

The Chair asked Councillor Belzak to commence his address to Committee in respect of the points raised within the second call-in.

Councillor S. Belzak

Councillor Belzak thanked Committee for attending and listening to the call-in. He advised Committee that in his address he would be concentrating on global warming issues and the existential threat to humanity as set out in the 21st Century Schools plan. He alerted Committee to the fact that there will be less walkable distances to school and more vehicles on the road which would mean burning more fossil fuels, ultimately contributing to climate change.

Councillor Belzak warned that we have until 2030 to change our ways and yet the Council seems to be carrying on with business as usual. For over 10,000 years Councillor Belzak explained that we have had stability in our climate and for our agriculture but there has been a dramatic change in global temperature by 1 ½ degrees. Official figures from NASA reveal that planet's average surface temperature has risen about 1.62 degrees Fahrenheit (0.9 degrees Celsius) since the late 19th century which is evidenced in recent temperatures. 2016 recorded the hottest temperatures in June/July which poses a threat to humanity, to our food sources and crops. He added that as the seasonal temperatures change and the temperature differential is reduced we see more cold and wet weather which impacts greatly on our crops especially in the USA which is one of the main global food suppliers.

Councillor Belzak stated that we seem to be heading in the opposite direction and ignoring the warnings and concluded that this way of life is unsustainable and we may not have a future beyond 2030.

Councillor L. Hooper

Councillor Hooper referred Members to points 3 and 4 within the reasons for Call-In outlined in the Call-In form and confirmed that he had previously addressed Members at the Cabinet meetings and Overview & Scrutiny Committees. He reminded Members that the Council is in the lowest quartile for school attendance in primary and secondary education across RCT. Councillor Hooper stated that this is a difficult matter to address but closing schools would not support the improvement of pupil attendance and moving the 6th form provision further afield would certainly not improve attendance.

Councillor Hooper quoted from the Council's Corporate Performance Report which presents RCT Council as a "Globally Responsible Local Authority...." and yet the proposals would see an increase in the number of vehicles on the road. The Council's Corporate Performance Report talks of clean air for future generations yet the Council has a 3-11 years education provision situated within metres from the busy A470 and YGG Evan James which is located close to the A4058, a road which is congested for several hours a day. He concluded that this matter requires further scrutiny and should be referred back to Cabinet.

Councillor E. Griffiths

Councillor Griffiths wished to highlight the point that the increase in local traffic, as demonstrated along a congested Rhondda Road which is located metres from the school gates of YGG Evan James (situated in Councillor Griffith's ward), does not support the Council's Corporate Performance report's priorities. The Councillor felt that a full traffic impact assessment should have formed part of the consultation in response to the Council acknowledging that there has been an increase in pupil numbers.

Councillor Griffiths stated that extensive scientific research shows that air pollution contributes to the short and long term adverse health outcomes such as diabetes, asthma and low birth weight. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Rights of the Child (Article 24), states that children should be able to live in a safe, healthy and clean environment and access education on Health & Wellbeing issues. In conclusion Councillor Griffiths advised that the Council should ensure its plans do not lead to further pollution for fear of failing to protect our children's health.

In response the Director Public Health, Protection & Community Services confirmed that the Council has a statutory duty to assess and review air quality against a number of Air Quality objectives set by National Government to protect public health. He added that the Council considers appropriate research and evidence and acknowledges the need to reduce air pollution in accordance with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

The Director Public Health, Protection & Community Services confirmed that the Council's annual Air Quality Update report demonstrates that the majority of RCT experiences good air quality. However, there are a number of very specific local circumstances which experience elevated levels of air pollutants. There are 16 air quality management areas and a series of air quality improvement plans in place. The Director stressed that the Council takes its responsibility seriously and where there is evidence of a breach in air quality, action is taken.

The Director Public Health, Protection & Community Services explained that the Council assesses air quality in respect of a number of pollutants which are identified as a concern. With the exception of Nitrogen Dioxide there are no areas identified as breaching the air quality standards for any of the other pollutants of concern. Further, the Director confirmed that Pontypridd High School has not been identified as a location where air quality standards are likely to be exceeded. The area has been monitored since January 2019 and results showed levels of 22 micrograms/m³ for Nitrogen Dioxide which is comparable with other areas within RCT that experience good air quality and significantly below the health based standard that is considered as acceptable (i.e. 40 micrograms/m³). The Director confirmed that we can be confident that Pontypridd High School will remain within the air quality objective. In conclusion, the Director reminded Committee that the local authority aspires to improving air quality regardless of its absolute value, as well as advocating for improvements to local and national public transport infrastructure the Council has supported direct measures such as the implementation of the 50mph zone on the A470.

The Head of 21st Century Schools advised that the case for creating 3-16 schools is detailed within the Consultation Document page 8. Further information was included within the Consultation Report on page 16 and this has again been responded to within the Objection Report on page 30. This question was also asked and discussed at the last call-in Scrutiny meeting on April 3rd.

She reiterated that the UK has a long established tradition of all through schools and middle schools. The benefits of the all through school are qualitative, and a number of papers that have been written and published on the subject focus on aspects of all through schools and the benefits of the model such as well-being, transition, social development and personalised learning at the point of readiness not at an age related stage.

All through schools are aligned with Donaldson Successful Futures enabling the delivery of the 6 areas of learning, providing opportunities to facilitate the cross curriculum learning environments and all through schools provide that continuum of learning. She confirmed the Education Department of the Council work continuously in partnership with all of its schools, governing bodies, and the Consortium to ensure that it supports all associated schools and have strengthened support and transition arrangements to ensure all our pupils receive the same opportunities.

The Service Director, Frontline Services commented that any new school development requiring planning consent involves a full transport assessment. Any issues arising are given due consideration with mitigation measures put in place to resolve any issues; such as congestion, parking and safe routes for walking and cycling. Travel plans to encourage sustainable travel are also developed and the local authority works closely with schools to improve pedestrian/cycling skills for pupils.

The Head of 21st Century Schools addressed the earlier query regarding the local authority's position in the lower quartile for attendance figures at both Primary and Secondary level. She stated that the figures at primary level have increased under the new 21st Century School arrangements which is a positive

improvement.

With regards to the increase in the pupil numbers at YGG Evan James, it was advised that as at 5pm on the 30th July 2019, the day before the meeting, no parents had submitted a formal request to move their children from YGG Pont Sion Norton Primary to YGG Evan James. The Head of 21st Century Schools reiterated the point that Welsh Medium Education schools in the area have capacity and parents can apply to send their children to any school of their choice, should they wish to do so.

A Member of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee although sympathetic of Councillor Belzak's concerns added that Home to School transport should reduce the number of vehicles driving to schools and thereby reduce the amount of carbon dioxide emissions and supported the need to produce effective travel plans. Furthermore, she suggested that modern school buildings under the proposals would be more energy efficient. The Member asked for further clarification in respect of the build of the new schools and a breakdown of the numbers of pupils leaving year 11 to attend Coleg Y Cymoedd.

The Head of 21st Century Schools reported that the new proposals meet environmental standards and facilities are built to BREEAM excellent standards and include features such as rain water harvesting and solar panels. In response the figures for those year 11 students attending Coleg Y Cymoedd in 2018 were reported as follows:-

- Of 77 Year 11 students in Cardinal Newman School, 57 attended Coleg Y Cymoedd
- Of 112 Year 11 students in Hawthorn High School, 72 attended Coleg Y Cymoedd
- Of 104 Year 11 students in Pontypridd High School, 75 attended Coleg Y Cymoedd

A Member of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee commented that her grandson will be attending Pontypridd High School in the future therefore noted the critical point raised by Councillor Belzak. Also noted were the Nitrogen Dioxide levels which are well within the recommended levels. The Member asked why the 50mph restriction on the A470 is necessary and whether monitoring levels/information for YGG Evan James can be reported. In addition, the Member commented that sixth form students have clearly voted with their feet and the key issue regarding the proposals concerned the location of the changes.

The Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services reminded Committee that the Air Quality Standards are set by Government and was not aware of any plans to change them at the moment. He reiterated that the monitoring levels for Pontypridd High School are well below the air quality standard for Nitrogen Dioxide. With regards to the 50mph limit on the A470, the Director explained that it does not apply beyond Pontypridd Town Centre and is

in place to achieve a better vehicle flow, encourage vehicles to be driven at optimal efficiency and is a Welsh Government directive to achieve EU limit levels. The Director confirmed that levels are monitored in several locations around Pontypridd Town Centre with two air quality management areas; Gelliwastad Road and the Broadway, both of which are showing long term improving trends.

The Head of 21st Century Schools then explained that there was no evidence to suggest that there were in-year transfers, however pupils migration would continue to be monitored and if there are any concerns, the relevant Governing Bodies would raise any issues with the local authority.

Another Member of the Committee challenged the statements about YGG Evan James and stated that pupils from YGG Pont Sion Norton are moving to YGG Evan James. The Member complimented Councillor Belzak on his earlier representation and added that she had read the annual review of the Air Quality Management Areas for RCT which suggested that there are staff resource issues within the service area and the equipment is ageing, which did not instil confidence in the process. The Member alluded to Councillor Hooper's address which referred to the lack of evidence to demonstrate which education model, be it 3-16, 3-19, 3-11 is best and suggested that the jury is still out on the all-through schools model.

The Member added that she had concerns that following 6th form closures, travelling under these arrangements will impact on the local authority as a whole. The Council needs to broaden its outlook and in view of the structures and factual representations from the three colleagues the Member confirmed that she is persuaded that Cabinet needs to reflect on these issues.

In response, the Director Public Health, Protection & Community Services stressed that there is no intention of reducing resources in respect of this process. If the equipment requires renewal, which it does periodically, this is identified and addressed. The Director added that there are two air quality management areas in Pontypridd Town Centre, both of which are showing long term trends for improvement and there are action plans in place to work alongside partners where necessary.

Also in response to the Member's previous address, the Head of 21st Century Schools stressed once again that she had no evidence to suggest that pupils are moving to YGG Evan James from YGG Pont Sion Norton, but could confirm that four pupils had moved to YGG Evan James from other schools recently. The Officer also clarified that the attainment and attendance outcomes of the 21st Century Schools would continue to be monitored and reported to Welsh Government accordingly, and a commitment had been made to provide regular updates to the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee.

Another Scrutiny Member raised the issue of pupil numbers and asked for further clarity as she had received comments from parents that the local authority is not allowing pupils to move schools until September 2019. She

asked if there is any evidence of parents moving their children from YGG Evan James or YGG Pont Sion Norton to English Schools and further when did we start monitoring these results?

The Head of 21st Century Schools confirmed that there is capacity in the Welsh medium schools in the area so no parents would be refused the opportunity of moving their children, she confirmed that two pupils have moved to an English medium school from YGG Pont Sion Norton, and that this movement is not unusual and purely a parental choice.

A Member of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee acknowledged the wider benefits of the proposals such as a heavily outdated Victorian schools being replaced by modern buildings.

Another Member questioned the catchment area for Cardinal Newman School following information that the School had previously moved its 6th form provision to Coleg Y Cymoedd only to have it reinstated. He also sought clarification on the 50mph zone on the A470, whether it was to monitor air quality or for some other purpose?

The Head of 21st Century Schools confirmed that any pupil can attend Cardinal Newman School and it currently has students from Caerphilly and Merthyr. She also confirmed that it was previously the school governor's decision to remove the 6th form provision.

The Director Public Health, Protection & Community Services also pointed out the specific areas along the A470 where the 50mph limit has been applied for air quality purposes.

In response to a Committee Members previous query as to whether the Council's carbon footprint has improved or worsened, the Chair pointed out that earlier that week a Scrutiny Working Group had formulated 9 recommendations in respect of the development of infrastructure to support low carbon vehicles in RCT and reduce the Council's carbon footprint. These recommendations would shortly be presented to the Cabinet for its consideration.

The Council's Chief Executive responded to the earlier query and stated that the Council's carbon footprint is difficult to measure due to students, parents and staff movements. However, what can be measured is the carbon footprint of the new, modern buildings which lend themselves to being more efficient and sustainable. He referred to two Victorian buildings which currently serve as schools in the Cilfynydd area which by their very nature are old and high users of greenhouse gases. Amalgamating schools onto one campus makes for a more efficient floor space.

The Chair invited Councillor S Belzak to sum up the argument in favour of referring the Cabinet decision back to the Cabinet for reconsideration.

Councillor Belzak commented on the greater distance pupils will have to travel under the new proposals which will be too far for four year olds to achieve on

foot, across the A470 in the case of pupils in the current Primary School in Cilfynydd. He added that this would be the same for pupils living in Ilan Avenue and walking to Hawthorn. He stated that manufacturing concrete and producing photovoltaic cells is environmentally destructive.

Councillor Belzak referred to the pollution process as lengthy, original research takes time to be verified and published and the Government 2010 guidelines do not take into account of evidence by Brugge, Durant et al. He stated that the view taken and data produced by the World Health Organisation is alarming. Councillor Belzak pointed out that aside from Nitrogen Dioxide, other pollutants exist and he acknowledged the fact that air quality is not measured at YGG Evan James. He added that sending pupils to schools where there are high levels of pollutants restricts concentration and learning as they affect cognition levels.

Councillor Belzak referred to the 'all-through' schools where graduate students are currently looking at the literature for evidence but none has been published although he added that he is happy to be proved wrong. In conclusion, he quoted the previous Director of Education at a meeting on the 29th November 2018 who allegedly stated that the, "evidence is not there yet that this is a better model".

Following consideration of the issues and in accordance with the Overview & Scrutiny Procedure Rules, it was **RESOLVED** that the matter not be referred back to Cabinet for reconsideration and the Cabinet decision taken on the 18th July 2019 take effect as from the close of the meeting. The decision was summarised by the Director for Legal Services.

(The following Members wished to have it recorded in respect of both call-in requests that they voted in favour of referring the decision back to Cabinet; Councillors L Walker, E Stephens and P Jarman).

This meeting closed at 11.45 am

**CLLR M. ADAMS
CHAIR.**