

## **Notes from RCT Council Scrutiny Committee**

**19th December 2018, 5pm**

**Number of councillors present - 12**

**RCT Council Officers present - Gaynor Davies, Andrea Richards, Lisa Howell, Sophie Nicholls, Christian Hanagan, Paul Nicholls, Claire Hendy**

The Director of Communications and Interim Head of Democratic Services explained to Members the purpose of the report. He informed Members that the report provides the opportunity for the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to engage in the formal consultation process, in respect of 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Programmes – Proposal to Improve Education in the Greater Pontypridd Area and Proposals to Improve Education in Cynon Valley.

On a number of occasions, Members of the committee have sought the opportunity to contribute and comment upon future 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools proposals being considered by the Council as part of Band B Programme.

It was explained that on the 20<sup>th</sup> September and the 3<sup>rd</sup> October Cabinet agreed to initiate a formal consultation process in respect of proposals for improving education in the Cynon Valley and improving education in the Greater Pontypridd Area.

The Director of Communications and Interim Head of Democratic Services explained to Members of the committee the format the meeting would be conducted in order to be consistent with the public meetings being held by the Council. It was explained that consultation would be presented as two separate items starting with the Cynon Valley Consultation first then moving on to the Greater Pontypridd Consultation. It was explained that the Scrutiny's views, alongside the schools and wider stakeholders engagement would be presented to Cabinet as part of the formal consultation process, before Cabinet determine whether to proceed or not with the next stage of the School Organisation Code.

The Director of Communication and Interim Head of Democratic Services invited the Director of Education and Inclusion Services and officers to conduct the consultation.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services thanked the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee for participating in the consultation and explained that the views of the Committee are sought in relation to the School Organisation Proposals for Hirwaun/Penderyn.

Members were informed that the reasons for the proposal is that Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council wishes to seek the views of a wide range of stakeholders on the proposal to:

- Improve and increase education provision in Hirwaun by investing in a new school for Hirwaun Primary School.

- Improve Welsh medium education provision by increasing the supply of places in the Upper Cynon Valley by making Penderyn Community School, currently a dual language school, a Welsh medium primary school.

The changes will be achieved by the construction of a new school building on the site of the current Hirwaun Primary School. The new school would have a capacity of 390 pupils (plus nursery). The new school would replace the current school buildings on the existing site.

Penderyn Community Primary School would become a Welsh medium community primary school with the capacity for 231 pupils (plus nursery). It was explained that as part of the proposal to change the language medium of Penderyn Community Primary School to solely Welsh medium, it is also proposed to amend and extend catchments to encompass the communities of Trenant and Penywaun (currently in the Welsh catchment for Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Aberdar). These adjustments are being made to the catchment area to match the demand for Welsh medium places in the locality.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services presented the consultation document in detail. At the end of the presentation, it was explained that the meeting is now open to any person present to inform officers of their views, which as indicated, will be recorded, and because this is a consultation, it may or may not, be possible to respond to all questions raised at this time, but all questions would be logged and formally included in the consultation report to Cabinet.

The Chair thanked the Director of Education and Inclusion Services for the overview of the proposal and explained to Members that the meeting does not have the jurisdiction to make any decisions but it provides an important opportunity to comment on the proposals and for the observations of Members to be reported back to Cabinet when they received the wider consultation feedback.

In respect of the improving education provision in Hirwaun by investing £10.4m in a new, school for Hirwaun Primary School, Members put forward their questions and observations.

A member explained that she had personally acted as a scribe in a recent meeting organised by Councillor Graham Thomas last Friday at Penderyn. This was not a formal Council meeting.

A Member asked in respect of the Hirwaun and Penderyn area and the concept of Welsh Education along with the Welsh Government plan for more Welsh speakers by 2050 had there been any pre-consultation with the community to take into account their views within the area.

It was explained that in the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) the Council has included in its plan to increase the number of children being taught through the medium of Welsh and specifically included in the plan is to:

- Provide new and improved school buildings with appropriate capacity.
- Consideration of making dual language schools into full Welsh medium schools.

The School Organisation Code is very prescriptive. The Code clearly states that it is not a requirement to hold any meetings to discuss proposals but we convene this as we deem it good practice. However, to adopt a consistent approach we do not hold pre-consultation meetings.

A Member questioned the maintenance figure of £1.9Million and asked how as a Local Authority we got to that situation. Members were informed of that, the school is a CLASP type construction and was built in the late 1960's. The buildings are difficult to maintain due to the management of asbestos and they have come to the end of their useful life.

A member enquired whether the Council has to pay for demolition costs? It was explained that all costs, including the demolition and asbestos removal costs, are included in the overall project costs.

Another Member complemented the proposal and thought it was a well thought out proposal.

In respect of the Transport issue, a Member asked with regards the provision of transport how much extra pressure would be put on school transport. It was explained that this is unclear at present, in respect of the English medium provisional numbers will fluctuate. In catchment pupils resident in Penderyn attending English medium stream will receive free transport to the new Hirwaun Primary School as the walking route is deemed unavailable.

In respect of Transport provision a Member expressed concerns as to whether there was sufficient public transportation to and from Penderyn. A Member commented that the bus service from Penderyn is an hourly service, which could be a serious issue for parents especially if they do not drive. If parents need to get to the school in an emergency this could be of concern.

Majority of Members felt strongly that the transport situation needed to be looked in greater detail. Officers explained that the Education Department collaborates with the Highways transport team and will raise the issue with the private sector transport company.

The Chair asked how can we make the Penderyn Welsh Medium School Proposal a positive one to the Communities of Hirwaun and Penderyn? The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that some parents feel strongly about removing the English stream however parents are already making a choice of choosing Welsh medium with only three pupils registered for English medium provision this year. However, there is positive feedback and the large capital investment in the community is seen as a real opportunity for the wider Cynon Valley schools in the area. We need to focus on equality and ensure all pupils have fair access to good education facilities and opportunities.

The Chair asked if the school would be able to accommodate any future housing development with the area and if this had been taken into consideration when devising the proposal. It was explained that the Council strategically manages its

school places and inputs into the Local Development Plan and regularly monitors new and proposed housing development in the area. A Member also explained that there is a proposal for Heads of the Valleys road duelling. There is possible development there and we hope that along that corridor it will bring employment to the area. To have a 21<sup>st</sup> Century school would be very positive for the area.

The Chair thanked the Officers and as there were, no further questions put forward on the Cynon Valley proposal asked Officers to proceed with the next consultation document to consider the Greater Pontypridd Proposal.