



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

3rd OCTOBER 2018

21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS PROGRAMME - PROPOSALS TO IMPROVE EDUCATION PROVISION IN THE GREATER PONTYPRIDD AREA

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE IN DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION, COUNCILLOR MRS J ROSSER.

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Members approval to begin the relevant and required statutory consultations for the proposals to:

- Develop post 16 centres of excellence based at Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School, Beddau and Coleg y Cymoedd, Nantgarw, investing £10m in new sixth form provision at Bryncelynnog;
- Create two new 3-16 schools, in Pontypridd and Hawthorn, which will take a radically different approach to education in these areas, by sharing both primary and secondary sector resources, investing £16.7m in improved educational facilities;
- Improve and increase Welsh medium primary provision by investing £10.7m in a new school to replace Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Pont Sion Norton and the Welsh Medium stream of Heol Y Celyn Primary School.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that Members note the information contained within this report and give formal approval to commence consultation on the specific proposals to:

- Close the sixth forms of Hawthorn High School, Pontypridd High School and Cardinal Newman RC Comprehensive School and transfer the post-16 provision to Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School or Coleg y Cymoedd, Nantgarw. It is proposed to invest

£10m in improving the sixth form facilities at Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School. Those students who opt for a Roman Catholic education, can apply for sixth form provision at St David's College, Cardiff, and home to school transport will be provided by the Council;

- Close Pontypridd High School and Cilfynydd Primary School and create a new 3-16 'all through' school on the site of the current Pontypridd High School site, investing £4.7m in improved facilities;
- Close Hawthorn High School, Hawthorn Primary School and Heol-Y-Celyn Primary School and create a new 3-16 'all through' school on the site of the current Hawthorn High and Hawthorn Primary Schools, investing £12m in improved facilities. The local authority designated ALN specialist class located at Hawthorn High School will also transfer to the new school.
- Close Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Pont Sion Norton and construct a new £10.7m Welsh Medium Primary School building on the site of the current Heol-Y-Celyn Primary School. The pupils attending YGG Pont Sion Norton, together with those educated through the Welsh Medium at Heol-Y-Celyn will transfer to the new school, subject to parental preference. The Heol-Y-Celyn pupils educated through the English Medium will transfer to the new 3 – 16 school at Hawthorn, again subject to parental preference.

All the proposals will be implemented by 2022.

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To improve the quality of the education provision available in the Greater Pontypridd area of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The rationale for the proposals for change in the primary, secondary schools and sixth form provision in the Greater Pontypridd area of Rhondda Cynon Taf is set out in the consultation document attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

- 4.2 Over the past few years secondary schools have sought to collaborate to meet the requirements of the Learning and Skills Measure 2009 and to offer a good quality post 16 learning experience to their pupils. Despite the best efforts of the headteachers, schools and the Council:

- There are too many small sixth forms in the County Borough and a rationalisation would better meet the educational needs of the students by strengthening management arrangements, improving the effective and efficient use of resources, and

ensuring a better quality educational experience. A viable sixth form, both educationally and financially should, ideally, have at least 250 students; in January 2018 Hawthorn High School had 114 sixth form students on roll and Pontypridd High School had 131, a total of only 245 between the two schools. Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School had 147 sixth form students in January, whilst Cardinal Newman RC Comprehensive School had just 80, less than a third of the recommended educationally and financially viable number.

- The delivery of post-16 education is inefficient and for many the educational experience could be considerably better. There is still unnecessary duplication of post 16 provision between schools and colleges, choice for many learners is restricted, class sizes are too small, and secondary school surplus places in the Greater Pontypridd area are projected to be over 775 surplus places in 2023, which equates to the same pupil numbers in Hawthorn High School. Effectively, in 2023 the Council will be funding one too many secondary schools in the Greater Pontypridd area. This leads to valuable education funds being directed at additional staff costs and infrastructure when they would be better directed at the learners and the learner experience. Currently, across Rhondda Cynon Taf, funds amounting to over £600 per pupil that were originally provided to educate 11-16 pupils are redirected at sixth form learners, to subsidise loss making courses due to small class sizes. This amount increases to an average of over £600 per pupil across both Hawthorn and Pontypridd High Schools; at Cardinal Newman this figure is almost £800. As a result the combined financial deficits of Cardinal Newman, Hawthorn and Pontypridd High Schools are predicted to be at 31st March 2019 in excess of £1.6m, the majority of which is a direct result of the decision of the schools to maintain small, expensive sixth forms at the educational detriment of pupils in years 7-11.
- Small class sizes found in many sixth forms leads to limited student interactions, which diminishes the effectiveness of learning. Across the four secondary schools, 44 post-16 courses were delivered in 2017 with less than 5 pupils per course. This poor learning experience for students is impacting on the numbers of students continuing their post 16 education in the four schools. The percentage of students opting, to stay on in their respective school, for a sixth form education in September 2017, was very low, being 31% in Cardinal Newman, 36% in Pontypridd HS, 46% in Hawthorn and 51% in Bryncelynnog. Where providers have made the greatest progress in collaborating to reduce inefficiencies and improve effectiveness, learner opportunities and student interactions increase. However, travel between providers is seen by some students as a barrier to access a wider choice of courses.

- The educational achievement and success at Key Stage 5 (in respect of the A Level results) of Hawthorn and Pontypridd High Schools are consistently below the Welsh averages and are amongst the lowest in RCT and Wales. However, Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School is an improving school and has consistently performed above the Welsh average for A level provision. Across all four secondary schools a step change is still required to raise the number of young people participating in education post 16 and improve the quality of learning outcomes by raising attainment, retention and progression.

4.3 To address these issues, we are proposing to create a larger sixth form provision at Bryncelynnog, with an investment of £10m to improve and expand facilities; together with the existing comprehensive post 16 provision at Coleg y Cymoedd this creates the capacity and economies of scale to be able to improve:

- Standards and Achievement – raising standards of success and achievement and increasing progression to Higher Education and employment.
- Choice – improving the breadth and depth of curriculum creating greater choice for all young people to choose learning pathways that best enable them to mix and match vocational, academic and occupational qualifications and experience.
- Participation – increasing participation and attendance rates.
- Equality – to ensure every sixth form student in the Pontypridd area is able to access the curriculum of choice.
- Ability to respond to future learners, community and business needs – Re-skilling and up-skilling the population of Rhondda Cynon Taf as the commercial environment changes, to allow people to compete effectively in the job market.
- Financial viability and effectiveness – providing a cost effective and efficient model for delivery, removing unnecessary duplication, aligning capacity with demand (in light of demographic change), generating economies of scale and expanding economies of scope. This will result in the removal of surplus places, the reduction in the number of small sixth form classes, and the duplication of provision between providers.

4.4 The opportunity exists therefore to reconfigure the primary and secondary schools in the Pontypridd and Hawthorn areas to create educationally and financially viable schools that serve the local communities.

4.5 In bringing schools together whether that is through amalgamation, federation or informal clustering, the purpose has to be to improve

teaching and learning and pupil outcomes. The benefits of 3-16 schools can be summarised as follows:

- A common ethos means pupils do not have to adapt to a new culture on moving schools;
- Coherent and consistent styles of teaching and learning progressing through the years gives stability to pupils' learning experiences;
- A comprehensive and common system for assessing, recording and tracking pupil progress throughout his/her schooling;
- Flexibility to provide the appropriate curriculum for individuals regardless of age;
- Increased access for pupils to a range of specialist accommodation, facilities and learning resources;
- Pupils with additional needs can maintain relationships with supporting agencies throughout their school career if required;
- A common attendance and behaviour policy means that routines are established and values understood from an early age;
- Parents/carers may remain more involved in their children's education as they do not have to establish new relationships with staff.
- The all through setting provides a context where teachers know their pupils well as they progress through school.
- The visibility of all ages in all through schools supports the sense of continuity and reinforces the concept of a learning journey and a sense of authentic progression.
- Mentoring between year groups and older children provides excellent role models for younger pupils.
- Best practice can be shared between phases. Bringing together different groups of practitioners in cross phase training providing 'collective opportunity for staff'.

4.6 Part of these proposals involve the closure of Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg, Pont Sion Norton and relocation of its education provision from its current site near Cilfynydd, Pontypridd, to a new, purpose built school building that will be constructed on the current site of Heol-Y-Celyn Primary School, Rhydyfelin, Pontypridd. Heol-Y-Celyn Primary School is a dual language school and it is proposed that the pupils educated through the medium of Welsh in the school shall transfer to the new Welsh Medium Primary School; the pupils educated through the medium of English in the school shall transfer to the new 3-16 School at Hawthorn. Heol-Y-Celyn Primary will subsequently close.

4.7 The 4 primary schools and the 4 secondary schools subject to closure or significant investment within this proposal have significant issues that need to be tackled:

- All 4 secondary schools had less than 150 pupils in the sixth form in January 2018, one of which had only 80 pupils;
- 3 of the 4 secondary schools have significant financial deficits primarily due to maintaining unviable sixth forms;
- The educational performance of the sixth forms has been mixed with two of the secondary schools consistently being amongst the worst performing schools in respect of A Level performance;
- In 3 of the 4 secondary schools, the majority of pupils at the end of Year 11 do not opt for the sixth form provision offered by their school, they choose an alternative. The lowest retention rate of Year 11 pupils is at Cardinal Newman RC Comprehensive School where only 30% of pupils returned to the sixth form in 2017;
- 1 primary school and 2 secondary schools have surplus places in excess of 25%, and across the 8 schools, there will be 1,138 surplus places in 2018;
- The 4 primary school buildings and sites are a limiting factor on the development of the curriculum and therefore have an adverse impact on further improvements in educational standards.

4.8 The opportunity exists to reconfigure the primary and secondary schools to create educationally and financially viable schools that serve the local communities. This proposal seeks to achieve this.

4.9 The Council, in partnership with Welsh Government, will invest £37.4m in building new or refurbishing/remodelling existing buildings to ensure the pupils have a high quality 21st Century learning environment.

4.10 This investment will include:

- A new sixth form block and improved facilities at Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School;
- New and refurbished buildings at the Hawthorn and Pontypridd secondary school sites to create two 3-16 schools;
- A new Welsh Medium Primary School to replace YGG Pont Sion Norton and the Welsh stream of Heol Y Celyn Primary on the Heol Y Celyn site.

4.11 The investment will also include a review of the safe routes to school, and an investment in improvements to walkways, road crossings and, if required, road speed management measures will be made to ensure the required safety standards are met. This is the approach we have implemented in other communities in earlier school reorganisation proposals with significant improvements being made to safe routes to schools.

4.12 To achieve these proposals, the Council is seeking to:

- Close the sixth forms of Hawthorn High School, Pontypridd High School and Cardinal Newman RC Comprehensive School and transfer the post-16 provision to Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School or Coleg y Cymoedd, Nantgarw. It is proposed to invest £10m in improving the sixth form facilities at Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School. Those students who opt for a Roman Catholic education, can apply for sixth form provision at St David's College, Cardiff, and home to school transport will be provided by the Council;
- Close Pontypridd High School and Cilfynydd Primary School and create a new 3-16 'all through' school on the site of the current Pontypridd High School site, investing £4.7m in improved facilities;
- Close Hawthorn High School, Hawthorn Primary School and Heol-Y-Celyn Primary School and create a new 3-16 'all through' school on the site of the current Hawthorn High and Hawthorn Primary Schools, investing £12m in improved facilities. The local authority designated ALN specialist classes located at Hawthorn High School will also transfer to the new school with future provision for expansion being included in the proposal.
- Close Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Pont Sion Norton and construct a new £10.7m Welsh Medium Primary School building on the site of the current Heol-Y-Celyn Primary School. The pupils attending YGG Pont Sion Norton, together with those educated through the Welsh Medium at Heol-Y-Celyn will transfer to the new school, subject to parental preference. The Heol-Y-Celyn pupils educated through the English Medium will transfer to the new 3 – 16 school at Hawthorn, again subject to parental preference.

4.13 The catchment areas of several of the schools included in these proposals will also be amended; full details of the proposed changes are outlined in the attached consultation document at Appendix 1.

4.14 The proposal is focused on raising educational standards at all key stages and ensuring that the limited financial resources are targeted at improving the learning environments for the pupils. The proposal will remove 1,300 surplus places, remove a maintenance backlog in excess of **£4.3m**, and address the educational and financial viability of sixth forms in the area.

5 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Welsh Language, Equality and Community Impact Assessments are being prepared in respect of these proposals and will be published on the Council's website together with the consultation documents that outline the proposals in detail.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The consultation processes in respect of these proposals will be undertaken under the arrangements outlined in the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (006/2013). These arrangements stipulate that consultation must be undertaken when the proposals are at a formative stage and that consultation documents must be prepared and circulated to prescribed consultees, as well as being published on the Council website.
- 6.2 The consultation document for the proposal outlined in this report is attached as Appendix 1 to this report; the proposed consultation period, if it is agreed to progress this matter will run from 15th October to 31st January 2019. Details of meetings that will be organised will be added to the draft consultation documents once they have been confirmed with the respective schools.

7. THE STATUTORY PROCESS

- 7.1 The process for closing schools is set out in the Welsh Government statutory code document 006/2013 – the School Organisation Code. The Code sets out the policy context and general principles for reviewing the supply of school places and sets out the factors that need to be taken into account by those bringing forward proposals. It also outlines the format of the consultation process and identifies the key stakeholders that must be consulted.
- 7.2 The Welsh Government has recently conducted consultation on revisions to the above Code and it is expected that a new statutory document will be put in place by 1st November 2018. The attached consultation documents and the consultation processes will therefore be conducted in accordance with the provisions of this revised Code.
- 7.3 The initial consultation on all proposals outlined in this report will involve all key stakeholders as outlined in the revised Code. This consultation will take place over a 12-week period (not including school holidays) and the proposed timetable for the whole process is as follows:
- Consultation period 15th October 2018 – 31st January 2019
 - Report back to Cabinet on outcome of consultation – February 2019
 - Statutory Notices published (if approved by Cabinet) for a 28 day period – March 2019

- Report back to Cabinet on outcome of statutory notice period and details of objections received, with appropriate recommendations – April 2019.

7.4 The School Organisation Code now makes provision for local authorities to determine their own statutory proposals; under the former arrangements, if just one objection was received following publication of the statutory notice, the proposals had to be forwarded to the Welsh Ministers, who would make the final decision as to whether the proposal could be implemented or not. This only now occurs when specific circumstances exist, e.g. if the proposal involves the removal of 6th form provision from a school.

7.5 The specific proposal that is not a closure of a school but relates to the removal of the 6th form at Cardinal Newman RC Comprehensive School will therefore be referred to the Cabinet Secretary for Education for determination, should this proposal progress to this stage.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 These proposals require a significant capital investment of £37.4m, of which it is proposed that 50% will be funded by the Council and 50% by the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools Programme. Welsh Government has approved the Council's 21st Century School's Strategic Outline Programme which sets out an indicative level of capital funding available over the period 2019-2026. The next steps are to undertake the statutory consultation on the proposals set out in this report and to submit financial business cases to Welsh Government. This is the process required before Welsh Government makes any financial funding commitment to specific projects.

8.2 During the course of the consultation period any revenue and capital costs that accrue in completing the consultation and preparing financial business cases for Welsh Government approval will be met from within existing budgets.

9 LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND THE WELL BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

9.1 The Council's Corporate Plan commits to "Continue to invest in improving school buildings, to ensure the County Borough's pupils have the learning environment fit for the 21st Century." The proposals considered in the report have taken into account the seven well-being goals and the five ways of working.

10 CONCLUSION

- 10.1 This is a very ambitious proposal that seeks to transform education provision in the Greater Pontypridd area, with an investment of £37.4m in new and improved facilities. Education standards in the area are improving but significant resources that should be released to improve educational opportunities for children are tied up in school sites that need to be significantly upgraded for 21st Century learning and unviable small sixth forms.
- 10.2 This proposal seeks to provide learning environments and learning experiences that are as good, if not better than those experienced across the best schools in the UK.
- 10.3 Members may have already seen the results of the Council's investment in new and improved schools across the Cynon and Rhondda Valleys, and in Taf Ely in Pontyclun, and Tonyrefail. These investments have been well received with parents and the local community. This proposed investment in Greater Pontypridd provides the opportunity for over 4,000 children to benefit from improved educational facilities.
- 10.4 It is recommended, therefore, that Members give approval to officers to commence the consultation processes necessary to achieve the proposal outlined in this report.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee: Children and Young People

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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Item: 21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS PROGRAMME - PROPOSALS TO IMPROVE EDUCATION PROVISION IN THE GREATER PONTYPRIDD AREA

Background Papers

The background papers included as appendices to the report are:

- **Consultation Document**
(The various Impact Assessments that are required are being prepared and will be published together with the consultation document)

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