

**Notes of a meeting held with staff and governors
at Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School**

22nd November at 3:30 pm

**Meeting to discuss the Council's proposals to reorganise school provision in the
Pontypridd area**

Present

Esther Thomas (ET), Temporary Service Director for Access & Inclusion Services,
Lisa Howell, 21st Century Team Officer
Martin Silezin, 14-19 Strategy Officer
Sophie Nicholls, Graduate Officer 21st Century Team
Gavin Tranter, Governor Support Service Officer
Bethan Davies, Human Resources Adviser
65 members of school staff and governors present

ET welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the proposal, the reasons for the proposal, the purpose of the meeting, the consultation process, the timescales relating to the consultation process and the proposals themselves should they be implemented.

Should the proposals be implemented, the Council seeks to:

- Develop post 16 education at Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School, Beddau and Coleg y Cymoedd, Nantgarw;
- Create two new 3-16 schools in Pontypridd and Hawthorn;
- Improve and increase Welsh Medium primary provision by building a new school on the former site at Heol y Celyn, which will incorporate the former provisions at both Heol y Celyn and YGG Pont Sion Norton;
- Amend the catchment areas of Pontypridd High, Hawthorn High and the 6th form catchment of Bryncelynnog Comprehensive Schools, to better meet and match the demand for school places;

These changes will be achieved by:

- Closing the sixth forms of Hawthorn High School, Pontypridd High School and Cardinal Newman RC Comprehensive School and transferring the post 16 provision to Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School or Coleg y Cymoedd, Nantgarw. For those students who opt for a Roman Catholic education, sixth form provision will be available at St David's College, Cardiff;
- Closing Pontypridd High School and Cilfynydd Primary School and creating a new 3-16 'all through' school on the site of the current Pontypridd High School;

- Closing Hawthorn High School, Hawthorn Primary School and Heol y Celyn School and creating a new 3-16 'all through' school on the site of the current Hawthorn High and Hawthorn Primary Schools. The local authority designated ALN specialist class located in Hawthorn High School will also transfer to the new school.
- Closing Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Pont Sion Norton and opening a new Welsh Medium Primary School to be constructed on the site of the current Heol y Celyn Primary School. The pupils educated through the Welsh Medium at Heol y Celyn will transfer to the new school and the Heol y Celyn pupils educated through the English Medium will transfer to the new 3–16 school at Hawthorn;

Amending the catchment areas for pupils aged 11-16 of the three LA maintained secondary schools by:

- Transferring the Graig area of Pontypridd which is part of the catchment area of Maesycoed Primary School to the new 3-16 school for Pontypridd (currently Hawthorn);
- Transferring the catchment area of Coedpenmaen Primary School to the new 3-16 school for Pontypridd (currently Hawthorn);
- Transferring the catchment area of Gwauncelyn Primary School to the new 3-16 school for Hawthorn (currently Bryncelynnog).

It is proposed that all changes will be in place by September 2022.

ET referred to the detailed information contained within the consultation document which had been circulated and the consultation response pro-forma contained therein (further copies of both were available at the meeting) and referred to page 5 of the consultation document which outlines how people can make comments.

ET explained that the questions/comments/responses would be recorded for inclusion in the consultation report, which would be fed back to Cabinet in early 2019, as would the feedback from pupils. ET stressed that this was a period of consultation and should the proposals proceed to the next stage (statutory notice), objections would be received and recorded at that stage.

The meeting was then opened for questions.

Q One concern we have as a school is that there is an enhanced sixth form for Bryncelynnog but there is one in Nantgarw too. How will you get pupils to come here if they are more likely geographically to go to Nantgarw?

A. It is parental choice or pupil choice ultimately. The range of A-levels at the college may differ to what the schools offer. For some pupils, college may be a better option, but many parents and pupils express an interest in attending a school. Parents haven't been polled on this and I don't think we would get a true reflection on this yet but our experience to date with the Rhondda proposals and in particular Tonyrefail is a positive one with pupils choosing the school as opposed to the college for A-level subjects.

A. It is important to think about what is the best learning pathway for our students. The arrangements that are currently successfully supported and operated in the Rhondda schools will happen in Pontypridd and Hawthorn. The school has a great opportunity to shape a new provision here. We will encourage pupils to attend the appropriate setting that meets their individual needs.

A. Retention rates at Pontypridd High and Hawthorn High are low so we want to encourage more A-level students to attend Bryncelynnog Secondary School, as the school is improving year on year and achieving good results.

Q. But we will lose pupils from Gwauncelyn?

A. Yes, possibly if the catchment changes are agreed. However, it must be noted that there is surplus capacity in the school and as long as there is spare capacity in the school, pupils from Gwauncelyn will not be refused a place. In addition, in the Local Development Plan there are strategic housing sites within the school catchment which could significantly add to the school capacity in the future.

Q. There are currently transport arrangements in place - how will that work for pupils in Pontypridd/Hawthorn?

A. If pupils want to study here then the Local Authority will be funding their transport if they live over two miles away – in accordance with the Council's transport policy.

Q. It's not so much the cost but the amount of time that it will take for them to get here.

A. The majority of pupils are currently in the consortium arrangements and travelling to and from different schools within the school day to access some subjects. It is acknowledged that some pupils may have further to travel but home to school transport as mentioned previously will be provided free of charge.

Q. On the basis we get more children, we may be able to get more staff. What will the £10m be used for?

A. Yes, additional teachers would be required. In terms of the building we will look to

remodel some areas and remove poor quality buildings and this will be undertaken collaboratively with the school. Exact details will be developed should the proposal progress.

Q. Do you have any plans for the buildings?

A. Officers cannot pre-empt the decision of the Council. We have had to put a bid in to Welsh Government as part of our 21st Century Schools Modernisation Programme Band B funding. Officers do have options to improve the school estates and if the proposals are approved by the Council we will consult fully with the school governors, staff and pupils.

Q. What if it the funding isn't enough?

A. The Council continually review the expenditure. We had good news yesterday as Welsh Government made an announcement to commit to a 65% intervention rate of funding for the next wave of investment. Therefore we will be able to spread the funding further and have more flexibility in terms of finances on future projects.

Q. You said parents often choose a school based on future success. If parents continue to want to send their children to come here, does our capacity then increase? The numbers don't seem to be increasing that much in the document. What happens if age 11-16 pupils don't drop that much but we still get additional sixth form pupils?

A. At the moment the school has surplus places and we will continue to monitor the supply and demand for pupil places. If additional capacity is required the Council will address this need and provide additional accommodation.

Q. We are currently in consortia with Y Pant. Will that be affected?

A. Great links have been forged and the two schools will continue to work together for the benefit of pupils. However, if the sixth form numbers improve, more subject options can be offered here and less pupils will need to travel to Y Pant for their curriculum choices.

Q. Would we be leaving Y Pant in a vulnerable position?

A. No because Y Pant has a successful and growing sixth form.

Q. We could be competing directly with the college if we can offer the same.

A. Yes it is possible that subjects will be offered by both establishments.

Q. I live in Tonteg and what is the thinking behind sending Gwauncelyn pupils to Hawthorn rather than here?

A. The Local Authority has to manage schools places and regularly review these to

match supply and demand.

Q. Parents are concerned about travelling to Hawthorn.

A. Most of the streets that form part of that area will qualify for school transport to Hawthorn, but while there is space in this school, parents / pupils can still choose to come here.

Q. Talking about building for the future, there is no guarantee that those housing developments will be built and in Efail Isaf we are being asked to object to those proposals.

A. There is an application going to Cabinet tonight for 400 houses and that would attract a large number of school places. The Council needs to be pro-active to strategically manage supply and demand for school places.

A. We appreciate that people don't like change and while there are spaces in our existing schools we have a duty to fill these empty spaces before we build new capacity into our schools.

Q. They would be eligible for transport to Hawthorn but not here?

A. Yes because that is their catchment school should this proposal be agreed Hawthorn High is also a good school and we need to have that balance.

Q. As a pupil they would go to Hawthorn for year 7 to 11 and then here for sixth form?

A. Yes, possibly or they may choose an alternative such as college.

Q. The catchment map in the document isn't particularly accurate in terms of defining the catchment area in terms of those streets.

A. We can provide a larger map for reference.

Q. I was delighted when I read this document and it says you will improve the areas for ALN. I am asking you to improve the facilities and expand the ALN/CDU unit here for post 16 provision. This is the opportunity to get it right. Has it been considered?

A. To the credit of the School Parliament, they have also asked us to look at this. This will be considered as part of the feedback.

Q. You have five key points and this is one of them and there is no other reference to this in the document - can you keep it a key focus and expand our provision? This will help us be in line with the new ALN proposals too. We don't want to be sidelined and we would love it to be written into the proposals now from the beginning rather than be an add-on. We are often

considered and then it is moved on. If we are going to be a 21st Century School then we need their right to equity to be considered and put in place rather than just be 'adequate'. If it is to be a centre of excellence then you need this to be a centre of excellence for all.

A. Your comments are noted and we would encourage you to complete the questionnaire to formally express your views.

Q. Beyond the strategy, what will the Local Authority do to support the aspirations within the plan? Parents/pupils will influence the proposal by making choices either to come here or go to the college. Could this proposal fail if there is no support to meet this plan?

A. The Council would not have put this proposal forward if we could not support the strategy moving forward. We have a track record of delivering successful projects and our aim is to improve educational standards in a 21st Century learning environment. If the proposal is approved we will support the school with transition to ensure that the school goes from strength to strength.

Q. The Governors are disappointed with the new artificial pitch, as we can't play rugby.

A. You can play rugby on the pitch and it has a shock pad for tackling. The run off area isn't appropriate for senior rugby matches but this is a school based all-weather pitch for multi sports.

Q. You could build on our grass pitch?

A. This is a school based community pitch and we are not building a facility which is just for rugby. The Council invested substantially in providing drainage to the rugby pitch to provide a good quality grass pitch. Therefore the 3G is an addition to the current facilities on offer.

Q. You also can't play hockey on this.

A. Yes you can play hockey on this pitch but not senior league matches.

Q. We would love to promote multiple sports too and to not be able to access this is an issue.

Q. You also can't play full size football on this because of the size. Also with the athletics facilities there are no hammer/discus facilities etc.

A. The Council is investing substantially in the school to improve facilities and the funding is not available to invest in stadium type facilities. The facilities that are being provided will ensure that the school can improve the delivery of the curriculum for PE and encourage sport for all pupils, improving their health and wellbeing.

Q. We weren't consulted in terms of revenue and the teams won't hire it because of the size. In terms of publicity this won't go well for us if the sixth form can't use it to play sports on.

A. This has not been the case with 3G facilities provided to other schools. The 3G pitches are a Council asset for pupils and the wider community. However, your points have been noted.

Q. Following the £24m spent on Y Pant, I spoke to Owen Smith MP who said that Bryncelynnog should be next for a new school. It seems unlikely that this would become a new site with a new school. This will predominantly remain a mid-20th Century School in terms of buildings.

A. The Council cannot comment on Owen Smith MP's conversation with the school. Planning of school places is a management issue for the Council. The Council has undertaken successful projects to remodel schools within our estate to develop them to provide 21st Century facilities. Therefore we do not agree with this comment.

Q. On that basis £10m isn't that much is it?

A. The Council will ensure that appropriate investment is made in the school and if additional funding is required Members will consider the matter further.

Q. Will you consult with us on those changes?

A. Yes, consultation will be undertaken throughout the process.

Q. Will the sixth form centre be part of the school or separate?

A. It will certainly be part of the school. The site will be looked at holistically and improvements made across all curriculum areas that will benefit all students not just the sixth form students.

Q. Can you give me an assurance that the school will be involved at the earliest stage for the planning of the building?

A. This is a two stage process. This is currently the consultation for school organization and the school will be fully involved in the development of the site if the proposal proceeds.

Q. It will be down to the school to decide what they offer in terms of curriculum, then surely the school needs to lead on the facilities we need?

A. As mentioned previously we will engage with the school and you will be heavily involved in designing and refurbishing the facilities. However, the school need to understand that schools need to be designed to a certain standard and meet certain regulations and the Council will ensure this is undertaken.

Q. Were they consulted in Ferndale in terms of their 3G?

A. I am disappointed that you are not happy with the 3G pitch. As we have other schools in RCT that would have been delighted with over £1m of investment in a 3G pitch and athletics track. This is a Council facility and we need to ensure that there is parity of provision across the county borough.

Q. For staff who may have to make career choices at the other schools involved in the consultation process, are there any plans to have them redeployed here?

A. They will all be in redundancy positions if this goes ahead but that is not the case here. If there are vacant posts here we would encourage them to apply for posts.

Q. If there are people who want to come here, will we be forced to take them?

A. We would ask you to consider them and if they are the best person for the job then you could appoint them. It will be a matter for the governing body.

All were thanked for their time and inputs and the meeting concluded.