



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL**

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Wednesday, 3 April 2019 at 10.00 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 E George
Councillor J Harries	Councillor H Boggis
Councillor J Brencher	Councillor E Stephens
Councillor G Caple	Councillor A Cox
Councillor M Griffiths	Councillor S Morgans

### **Signatories to the Call-In**

Councillor M Powell  
Councillor M Fidler Jones  
Councillor H Fychan  
Councillor S Belzak  
Councillor L Hooper

### **Cabinet Members in Attendance**

Councillor M Webber – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Council Business  
Councillor J Rosser – Cabinet Member for Education & Lifelong Learning  
Councillor G Hopkins – Cabinet Member for Adult Community Services & Welsh Language  
Councillor R Bevan – Cabinet Member for Enterprise Development & Housing

### **Other Members in Attendance**

Councillor S Bradwick – Chair of Public Service Delivery, Communities & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee  
Councillor S Pickering – Local Member for Ynysybwl

### **Officers in attendance**

Mr C Bradshaw – Chief Executive  
Mr C Hanagan – Service Director of Democratic Services and Communications  
Mr A Wilkins – Director of Legal Services  
Mrs G Davies – Director of Education and Inclusion Services  
Mr B Whittingham – Head of Achievement, Secondary  
Ms A Richards-Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools  
Mr P Mee – Director Public Health, Protection & Community Services  
Mr R Waters – Service Director Frontline Services

## 1 Declaration of Interest

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

1. County Borough M Webber declared the following personal interests in respect of the matter-" I am on the Governing Body of Heol Y Celyn Primary School but my interest is not prejudicial because of the exemption contained within paragraph 12(2) (a)(iii) of the Members Code of Conduct."  
  
"My Grandchildren attend a school referenced within the proposals"
2. County Borough Councillor J Rosser 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".
3. County Borough Councillor S Pickering declared the following personal interest in respect of the matter – "I am on the Governing Body of Hawthorn High School."
4. County Borough Councillor S Belzak declared the following personal interest in respect of the matter - " I am a Governor of Cilfynydd Primary and YGG Pontsionorton"
5. 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"
6. County Borough Councillor L Hooper declared the following personal interest in respect of the matter – " I have family members who attend a school referenced in the proposal"
7. County Borough Councillor J Brencher declared the following personal interest in respect of the matter – "I taught at Pontypridd High School"
8. County Borough Councillor J Bonetto declared the following personal interest in respect of the matter - "I am on the Governing Body of Hawthorn High School"
9. County Borough Councillor H Fychan declared the following personal interest in respect of the matter – "Personol – Llywodraethwraig YGG Evan James"
10. County Borough Councillor E. George declared the following personal declaration of interest in respect of the matter – " A member of my family attends Pontypridd High School"
11. County Borough Councillor M Fidler Jones declared the following declaration of personal interest in respect of the matter – "I am on the Governing Body of Helo Y Celyn Primary School and Hawthorn Primary School"

12. Mr Jeff Fish (Voting Elected Parent/Governor Representative) declared the following personal interest in respect of the matter – “I am a Parent Governor of Bryncelynnog Comprehensive and also the Chair of Maesybryn Primary”
13. Mr C Bradshaw " 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”

## **2 21st Century Schools Programme**

### **WELCOME & PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the Special Meeting of the Committee and reminded Members that the procedure did not involve scrutinising the proposals before them but that consideration should be given to the reasons for call-in. The Chair reminded Members that two call-in’s had been received standing in the names of:-

Councillor M. Powell;  
Councillor H. Fychan;  
Councillor M. Fidler Jones; and

Councillor S. Belzak;  
Councillor L. Hooper; and  
Councillor Diamond.

The Chair advised Committee that as part of today’s proceedings three members of the public, namely Ms Billie-Mai Cox, Mr Wil Morus Jones and Mr Edwin Mead, would be invited to address Committee at the appropriate juncture.

The Service Director Communications and Democratic Services outlined the procedure for the call-in process and explained that the Cabinet report which had been considered at its meeting of the 21<sup>st</sup> March 2019, the Cabinet Decision Notice and details of the two valid call-in forms were included in the Committee papers. For the benefit of all those present he clarified the seating arrangements for the Overview & Scrutiny Members, the relevant Officers and Cabinet Members, the signatories to the two Call-in’s and members of the public.

The Service Director advised that the three Members making the call-in would be invited to address the Committee in support of the reasons given by them in requesting the call-in, a copy of which was attached at Appendix D. He explained that the responsible Officers and Cabinet members would have the opportunity to respond. Members of the public, as alluded to by the Chair and a local Member who had requested to speak, would then have their chance to address members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. It was proposed that one of the three Members be given the right to make a final address to the Committee immediately before a vote would be taken on the proposal. He pointed out that if the proposal to have the matter referred back to Cabinet was unsuccessful, then the Cabinet decision would take effect immediately at the conclusion of today’s meeting. The Service Director pointed out that Mr Jeff Fish, a Co-opted Member was also in attendance although he was not eligible to vote

on the matter.

In conclusion, Committee was advised that in accordance with the call-In Procedure Rules, the presence of all three signatories is required before the matter can be heard, however in the case of the second call-In, Councillor Mike Diamond has offered his apologies, and as a result of the circumstances, the Chair agreed that the matter could continue to be considered.

## **CALL-IN – 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SCHOOLS PROGRAMME**

### Councillor M. Powell

Councillor M. Powell stated that he would make the final address to Committee on behalf of the three signatories to the call-In.

Councillor Powell stated that the consultation is referenced 366 times throughout the report and on page 16 contains a list of consultees such as governing bodies. Despite being listed as a consultee, Councillor Powell explained that Coedpenmaen Primary was only consulted about the change to the catchment area. Coleg Y Cymoedd is mentioned 141 times in the report but the consultation process undertaken with the college is not listed. Despite meeting with the School Council on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 2018 at 3.30pm at Hawthorn High (a similar event was held in Pontypridd High School) there is no mention of this consultation process. Councillor Powell added that on the 26<sup>th</sup> November 2018 a consultation event was held with 26 students at Coleg Y Cymoedd, however, no information is given about the level of the students involved and suggests that the students present at the meeting were cherry picked. He questioned the misleading nature of some of the questions in the consultation process such as “Do you think sixth form in schools is old fashioned?”

In conclusion Councillor Powell stated that removing sixth form provision from the Greater Pontypridd area is something that requires greater scrutiny than was actually allowed.

### Councillor M. Fidler Jones

Councillor M Fidler Jones stated that this consultation procedure was not the best example of how a consultation process should be conducted as it consisted of binary choice and multi-faceted proposals. He indicated that some of the proposals were good, others less so and it was those responses which had not been captured. He felt that as the original proposal was not the one considered by Cabinet the proposal itself has been undermined. Councillor Fidler Jones agreed with large parts of the proposal but felt that the final decision had not been consulted upon and needed to be for the future of our children.

### Councillor H. Fychan

Councillor H. Fychan indicated that she would be addressing the Welsh Medium Education proposals. She stated that the proposals as a whole needed further consideration but added that all those who have raised concerns about the Welsh language provision are not opposed to change or to the creation of a new Welsh Medium Primary School at the Heol y Celyn site. Councillor Fychan considered that the proposals will lead to a reduction in the number of Welsh medium schools in Pontypridd to two and that the demand for Welsh medium education in the vicinity of Heol y Celyn could increase which would mean that the new school may have to reconsider its catchment area.

Councillor Fychan explained that because the proposal will remove Welsh

medium education in north Pontypridd, evidence from parents suggests they will choose English medium education due to the increased travel time from Ynysybwl, Glyncoch and Cilfynydd to Heol y Celyn and the need to take two buses to the new site. She referred Members to Estyn's comments captured in the first and second paragraphs on page 275 of the report in respect of the impact of further travel and ....*"it is Estyn's opinion that the proposal is likely to at least maintain the current standards of education in the area"*, which suggests that the health and wellbeing of our pupils has not been considered.

Councillor Fychan stated that at the Cabinet meeting it was proposed for the first time that parents could send their children to YGG Abercynon or YGG Evan James if they lived in north Pontypridd as both would be closer, which she considered swayed the Cabinet decision at the time. Councillor Fychan raised concern that no consultation had been undertaken in respect of this proposal or in respect of the catchment areas for Welsh medium education.

In conclusion Councillor Fychan urged that all proposals need to be consulted upon including a change in catchment areas to ensure that any changes in place are the right ones for the future of Welsh medium education in Pontypridd. She added that Pontypridd is, after all, the home of our National Anthem "O bydded l'r heniath barhau"

Following the addresses made by the three Members, the Chair called upon the Director of Education and Inclusion Services, the Cabinet Members for Education & Lifelong Learning and for Adult Community Services & Welsh Language to comment on the issues raised.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services considered that there had been an over emphasis placed on the information provided in respect of the Coleg y Cymoedd meeting, as it was one of numerous consultation meetings minuted and attached as an appendix to the consultation report. The Director reported that a group of learners had been randomly selected by Coleg y Cymoedd staff from pupils that had previously attended the schools affected by the proposals. Furthermore, there was no reference to the outcomes from the meeting in the consultation report, the meeting was not closed and had followed the same procedures as the other meetings.

It was reported by the Director that it was important and appropriate for the learners to voice their opinions and it was not for the Council to interpret and edit their views. She added that the same approach had been taken in the other school consultation events as with Coleg y Cymoedd. Negative feedback in respect of specific subject teachers had been redacted in the report. The reference had represented the view of a young person.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services assured Members that all the information captured from all consultation events and responses had been made available to the Cabinet Members so as to assist them in making an informed decision.

It was confirmed that the Council has been fully compliant with the School Organisational Code and the Director reminded Committee that the Council is under no obligation to hold consultation events. Nevertheless, the Council acknowledge the importance of stakeholder consultation and allowed 108 days to the consultation process not the 42 days required as the minimum standard. Throughout this process it was felt that a large proportion of the population had

been given the opportunity to express a view and Cabinet Members had a three week period in which to consider the proposals and the responses made to them.

In respect of Welsh Medium Education, the Director confirmed that these proposals were not reliant on surplus places being available in other schools as plans would enhance not reduce capacity in Welsh medium schools. The Director viewed the surplus capacity as offering a choice for parents as they can apply for places in other schools should they wish to do so, which can only be considered as a positive thing for residents of RCT. The Director confirmed that this issue had been raised by Cabinet following their review of the evidence, which shows the level of scrutiny undertaken by the Cabinet Members.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services stated that currently 70% of learners in YGG Pont Sion Norton travel to school and the proposed new site would reduce daily travelling by 1.1 miles.

The Cabinet Member for Education & Lifelong Learning reported that there had been nine meetings in total with pupils at the various schools, including Coleg y Cymoedd. In addition, 8 further meetings were also held on the same night for staff and Governors. She assured Members that all the consultation responses, minutes and reports were made available for Cabinet Members to make an informed decision and clarified the following points:-

**Data** – all data used in the consultation document is valid as the local authority is not allowed to use data which has not been verified and published;

**Financial** – 3 of the secondary schools in question are in deficit and deficit recovery plans are in place. Over 60% of learners decided not to return to 3 of the secondary schools to continue their 6<sup>th</sup> form education, low numbers returning to school resulted in a limited choice of subjects being offered due to affordability;

**Consultation methodology**- the local authority has gone over and above the statutory requirements and received an unprecedented response to the consultation;

**Welsh Medium Education Schools** – Cabinet raised this issue and asked for further information relating to a strategic overview of capacity (an extra 90 places built in as well as extra capacity in other schools). No change to catchment areas.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Community Services & Welsh Language reminded Members that the proposals had undergone pre scrutiny by the relevant Scrutiny Committee in advance of the proposals being considered by Cabinet. The consultation process exceeded that of the standard 42 days for a consultation period by 2.5 times which allowed the public more time to respond to the proposals in a number of different ways, via written responses and social media.

The Cabinet Member concluded by assuring Committee that Cabinet has taken its responsibilities seriously regarding this matter, as it does with all important issues, in particular the proposals in respect of Welsh Medium Education, which the Cabinet Member stressed was of particular interest to him. He stated that the proposals would enhance and increase the number of places available to our students.

### Public Speakers

Two public speakers, Ms Billie Mai Cox and Mr Wil Morus Jones were afforded the opportunity to address Committee at this juncture in the proceedings and did so on the following issues:-

- Concerns in respect of 6<sup>th</sup> Form provision in Bryncelynnog School based on the lack of direct travel links to the school;
- Travel time eating into school work;
- Most students live in the same area as their school;
- Wellbeing of pupils travelling away from their support systems causing stress;
- Limited information in respect of college results (only based on one year's results);
- Concern over the future of Welsh Medium education ;
- Concern over travelling distances under the new proposals;

Having heard the points raised by those Members who had made the Call-in and the responses from the Director of Education and Inclusion Services and the relevant Cabinet Members as well as the Public Speakers, the Chair then invited the Committee to ask any questions they may have.

A Member queried the value of the Scrutiny process in light of the fact that members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee were allowed only five minutes to address their points.

The Member also queried why Coleg y Cymoedd was not listed as a consultee and asked what has been done to deal with the shortcomings in respect of a number of points raised by Estyn regarding the lack of sufficient evaluation and information relating to the impact of the changes to catchment areas, travelling times and SEN provision. The Member also found the report in respect of 'dual language' to be clumsily worded. She asked what the rationale is behind having the 6<sup>th</sup> form provision in Bryncelynnog which is located close to Y Pant School. In conclusion, the Member asked if there was any truth that a student was told what to say in his address to Cabinet?

In response the Director of Education and Inclusion Services stated that the wellbeing of all pupils is of paramount importance and the new larger schools will be able to provide enhanced opportunities to develop specialist posts. She added that outcome data for Coleg y Cymoedd is very positive with a high proportion of A\*-C grades being achieved. There is a good provision of A Level courses at the college with over 300 students following courses at this level.

In respect of Welsh Medium Education, the Director referred Committee to the Council website which highlights the report relating to Welsh Medium Education provision in RCT. Since 2012 there have been enhanced places in Ysgol Llanhari, YGG Llwyncelyn, YGG Tonyrefail and plans are in place for an extension in YGG Aberdar and a new 3-19 School for Ysgol Garth Olwg. 90 additional places are proposed in Heol y Celyn and further places are planned for a range of settings including Dolau School, Ysgol Penderyn and Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun as well as a huge investment in Welsh medium early years provision.

As to why Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School has been identified, it was reported that the current 6<sup>th</sup> form retention rates are good, the school has

demonstrated positive outcomes and a good range of curriculum choices.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Community Services & Welsh Language stated that he considered the earlier point raised by the member of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in respect of the student being told what to say in his address to Cabinet as inappropriate. The Member confirmed that it had been “suggested to her” that was the case and she had ended her question asking if there was any truth behind the claim. The Member considered that an apology and a retraction from the Cabinet Member should be forthcoming. The Cabinet Member for Education & Lifelong Learning confirmed that the young person in question had volunteered to speak.

A Member from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee raised a point in respect of the need for a pre consultation process for the Welsh Medium Education matter which may have been a useful tool as residents want to be involved at an earlier stage. The member asked for clarification in respect of pupils being asked to travel further to access Welsh Medium Education.

In response, the Director of Education and Inclusion Services reiterated her point that there are no changes to the catchment areas but catchment areas are regularly reviewed to ensure the adequate provision of school places in the right areas. In relation to the Pont Sion Norton proposals, pupils will travel 1.1 miles less under the current proposals. Pre consultation is not a requirement of the School Organisation Code but reference was made to the consultation proforma which enables consultees to expand their comments and provide detailed responses should they so wish to do so.

The Co-opted member, although grateful to hear the Cabinet Members assurances, raised the following points in respect of the consultation with Coleg y Cymoedd and referred to the minutes of the meeting within the report on pages 184-188, held at the college which he felt did deviate from the set structure afforded to other schools. He queried the ‘randomly selected students’ as not including students from Bryncelynnog (as he is a Governor at Bryncelynnog School). As the students weren’t asked if they had any questions at the end of the meeting he questioned the validity of the process. In his second point the Co-opted member referred to the speech made by the public speaker Ms Cox and her claim that her only choice is to attend Coleg y Cymoedd and to the concerning commentary around wellbeing by Estyn and he asked if that element has been considered by Cabinet.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services addressed the issue of ‘randomly selected’ students present at the meeting as being those from schools affected by the proposals. She assured Committee that the structure of all the meetings was carried out in a way that presented clear information but did allude to the fact that the flow of the meetings with young people were all different but it was important that all learners were given an opportunity to express their opinion. This meeting was only part of a wider and extensive consultation process, involving thousands of consultees. The Director also stated that there is no evidence to suggest that the proposals will have an adverse effect on learners and further, if Head Teachers from the new Rhondda Schools were present today, they would be able to highlight the positive impact of the new schools and of children wanting to attend the schools in question.

In addition the Cabinet Member for Education & Lifelong Learning reiterated that the notes from the meeting at Coleg y Cymoedd consisted of just 4 out of 300



pages of the report and she assured Committee that all documentation was taken into consideration.

Another member of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee raised the following points:-

- Retention data - Lack of opportunity to scrutinise the data which would have been useful to benchmark against the proposals;
- Consultation methodology – How the consultation was conducted and how we can learn from that;
- Welsh Medium Education – Unclear on the distances pupils will need to travel – if a school is moved from its locality and it is further away, there must be an increase in the travel distance. Although we welcome the additional places, it's where those extra places are. At Cabinet it was noted that pupils could go to YGG Evan James and YGG Abercynon which is new information and would change the catchment areas;
- Support Welsh speakers – the ambition to support 1 million Welsh speakers, where is the plan to meet that provision?

The Director of Education & Inclusion Services responded to the queries and added that the parents in RCT do have good choice as the schools are equitably distributed around RCT with available spaces in place.

The Service Director Frontline Services explained that there are currently no dedicated transport facilities at Pont Sion Norton School. Buses park on the highway and face south bound so that pupils are on the correct pavement side for the school and do not have to cross the road. In order to achieve this position, the buses are required to drive up the A470, leave via the slip road at Abercynon and drive back toward Pontypridd, meaning that the distance travelled by pupils is longer in the mornings. The buses follow this route to pick up in the afternoon, the pupils have a shorter journey home. The current daily distance travelled by pupils between Pont Sion Norton School and Robertstown Hotel is 13.1 miles. The daily combined distance travelled by pupils between Heol y Celyn School and the Robertstown Hotel will be broadly 1 mile less.

Another Member from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee stated that she had attended all the meetings and consultation events and noted the positive comments from them but raised the following points:-

- What happens if students miss the bus;
- The focus on Coleg y Cymoedd is welcome and it has its function as there's no tertiary system in RCT;
- The College does not present all subjects;
- If only 15% of students take up the option of attending Bryncelynnog will the other pupils' needs be addressed?

Opportunity was afforded to the Local Member for Ynysybwl who had previously made a request to speak through the proper procedures. The Local Member advised that YGG Pont Sion Norton and Heol y Celyn parents in her ward have a difficult decision to make given that 3 year olds will be expected to travel two hour round journeys with an additional burden on parents and grandparents. She urged Members to take parents' views into consideration.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services stated that the £37.4 million

investment will significantly improve learners' experiences and provision. She reminded Members that currently 70% of children are already being transported to Pont Sion Norton School and the impact on families is negligible. Whilst references were made to emergency arrangements, it was highlighted that a duty of care still rests with the school in the event of unexpected illness or emergency situations.

The Service Director Frontline Services explained that currently the route from Ynysybwl to Cardinal Newman School takes 41 minutes from Robertstown Hotel and if the journeys are timed correctly, utilising the half hourly service from Ynysybwl to Pontypridd, a child could make the journey on public transport in 39 minutes.

The Chair thanked the speakers for their contributions. He stated that he understood both sides, as a teacher himself but suggested that these proposals would give parents more choice. The Committee, having debated the issue, the Chair invited County Borough Councillor M. Powell to sum up the argument in favour of referring the Cabinet decision back to the Cabinet for reconsideration.

Councillor Powell described the procedures of the meeting and the process of trying to encompass all the changes in the allotted time as impossible. He raised further concern in relation to comparing Coleg y Cymoedd with Hawthorn High due to the latter having a higher number of FSM's and the added value that children would gain from attending these schools. He advised that the data within the report should not have been split but combined. He referred to earlier discussions around Centres of Excellence and pointed out that Aberdare School is currently in special measures. In conclusion Councillor Powell expressed his concern regarding the transportation of 3, 4 and 5 year olds to Heol y Celyn, via a very busy route.

At this juncture in the proceedings, Councillor Jarman stated that she wished to move a motion in respect of the little opportunity afforded to members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (a maximum of 5 minutes each speaker) in comparison to the time given to the relevant Chief Officers to respond, who the member felt had a lot longer. The Chair did not allow the motion and stated that he had made it clear from the outset that Members of the Committee would only be afforded five minutes.

Following consideration of the issues and in accordance with the Overview & Scrutiny procedure rules, it was **RESOLVED** that the matter not be referred back and that the decision taken on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 2019 take effect as from the close of the meeting.

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

#### Councillor Belzak

In the first instance Councillor Belzak thanked the Committee for allowing the matter to be heard under exceptional circumstances.

Councillor Belzak alluded to the Council's complete failure to discharge its duties under the Health & Wellbeing Act. Regarding Cilfynydd Primary and Pontypridd High School, he stated that despite a written submission to Cabinet, which had not been responded to, the matter seemed to have been ignored. Councillor Belzak referred to the very extensive availability of Public Health literature which

reports on those that spend their days close to road having greater respiratory/obesity problems and in view of this, there is no excuse for putting a school next to the A470.

Councillor Belzak concluded his representation by stating that the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has stated that we have twelve years to change our ways in respect of climate change before the world as we know it ends.

#### Councillor Hooper

Councillor Hooper referred to the procedures in the Cabinet meeting and consultation as reasons for the Call-in. He stated that if £37 million is to be spent on schools in Pontypridd he stressed the importance of spending the budget effectively and to ensure the tax payers money is spent wisely. He referred to the comments of the Director of Education regarding the reduction in school places but the reduction by 8 school places is not a huge step towards achieving that.

(The Chair reminded Councillor Hooper to have regard to the reasons set out in the notice of call-in form)

Councillor Hooper raised concern that the Council was supporting a proposal when it didn't know what the proposal would be. He referred to earlier remarks, "...bedding in and a success" and added that many schools are going through financial difficulties and pointed out that a consequence of closing the 6<sup>th</sup> Forms is transport, the costs of which are not set out in the report. He added that the estimated costs for the transport are unknown and he urged the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to send this back to Cabinet so that a proper consultation can be undertaken and that Committee can be sure that the £37 million is being spent efficiently.

In response the Director of Education & Inclusion Services reported that the Council is not in breach of air quality objectives and she confirmed that the report includes a lot of detail in respect of this matter. The Director confirmed that the Council is able to measure the impact of the investment in the Rhondda Schools which opened in September 2018, with reports presented to the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee as well as Welsh Government as part of the proposals. The Director reported that the expectation is that sustainable travel arrangements are implemented along with safe walking routes which will promote healthier journeys to school.

The Cabinet Member for Education & Lifelong Learning supported the comments of the Director of Education and stressed that there has been positive feedback from the Heads of the new Schools in the Rhondda with a reported overall increased attendance.

The Director Public Health, Protection & Community Services confirmed that Air Quality has been reviewed by Cabinet. He explained that the local authority conducts regular monitoring and review of air quality to determine compliance to statutory Air Quality Objectives, set by national government to protect public health. The Director confirmed that the vast majority of Rhondda Cynon Taf exhibits good air quality. The Council has been monitoring Local Air Quality for a long time and he confirmed there are Quality Management Areas (AQMA's) in Rhondda Cynon Taf which reflect breaches of a relevant air quality standard for Nitrogen Dioxide (which is associated with traffic omissions and is influenced by

the flow of traffic and prevailing winds). The Director confirmed that a location twenty metres from a highway such as the A470 is compliant and because of the lower elevation of the School, Pontypridd High School is not at risk and therefore it is not a material consideration. The Director confirmed that an air quality monitoring device has been installed at the site of Pontypridd High School to gather data for a 12 month period.

The Service Director Frontline Services confirmed that all proposals will require a transport assessment and a review of the walking and cycling routes which is likely to bring about improved sustainable transport routes. He explained that there are contracted buses for Bryncelynog and that vehicle utilisation in RCT is amongst the best in the country. In conclusion, the Service Director advised that there are college season tickets for existing public transport routes which has helped to support a viable public transport network.

### Public Speaker

The third public speaker, Mr Edwin Mead was invited to address Committee in respect of the closure of Cilfynydd Primary School as his two children attend the school currently. Mr Mead outlined his representation to include the following points:-

- Surplus places – Reduction of only 8 places in view of a target of 25%;
- Maintenance of the school (page 50 of the report) which has had a c and b rating;
- Cilfynydd Primary School has no deficit;
- 3-16 Schools are a large investment – not cost effective;
- 78% against the 3-16 School- 500 people signed the petition against the closure of Cilfynydd School.

A member of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee queried an earlier comment that if air quality is not a material consideration why is monitoring equipment in place at Pontypridd High School? She also queried the burden of cost for transport between Pontypridd High School and Hawthorn.

In response to the query regarding monitoring equipment the Director Public Health, Protection & Community Services clarified that it was not a material consideration in relation to this particular proposal. He added that the Council takes its responsibility in respect of air quality seriously and as such there are 50 monitoring sites around RCT that contribute to an annual screening assessment. The Director confirmed that the monitoring device at Pontypridd High School will provide additional assurance and confidence that the school is unaffected.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that it was important to consider the rationale behind the proposals, that a high number of learners are not choosing to return to 6<sup>th</sup> form education and there was a need to address the retention rates, outcomes and budget deficits. There are currently over 1,100 surplus spaces across the board.

Two further queries regarding the call-in process were directed at the Director of Education and Inclusion Services, what information was presented to Cabinet that led it to believe that these are better models for our children and did the information provided include the retention rates? Did Cabinet fail to consider social exclusion with provision of breakfast clubs and after school clubs?

In response the Director of Education confirmed that the retention rates are included in pages 15-16 of the consultation document. She also clarified that before and after school provision is not a statutory requirement. The Director also confirmed that no other sites were considered prior to this proposal.

At this point in the proceedings, Councillor Powell left the Council Chamber at the request of the Chair in view of his refusal to refrain from addressing Committee at this stage.

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

Councillor Belzak pointed out that, as previously alluded to, no one had responded to his remarks and comments regarding climate change and other dire warnings which only confirmed to him that there had been no consideration or consultation in respect of the obligations to have arisen from the Paris 2015 Climate Accord and the matter had not been discussed at Cabinet. With regard to air quality guidance, he considered the 20 metres required clearance to still be within the danger zone and Councillor Belzak reminded Committee that on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2018 he advised Cabinet that expert advice and knowledge was needed to address this matter. As the report had failed to address climate change Councillor Belzak urged the issue to be referred back to Cabinet. He also stated that not one paper has evidenced the benefits of the new schools.

Following consideration of the issues and in accordance with the Overview & Scrutiny procedure rules, it was **RESOLVED** that the matter not be referred back and that the decision taken on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 2019 take effect as from the close of the meeting.

**This meeting closed at 13:25**

**Cllr M Adams  
Chairman**