



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

13TH DECEMBER 2021

21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS PROGRAMME – PLANNING OF SCHOOL PLACES SOUTH OF THE COUNTY BOROUGH

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER (COUNCILLOR MRS J ROSSER)

**Author(s): Gaynor Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Andrea Richards, Service Director, 21st Century Schools and Transformation**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Members on the pressures on school places in the south of the County Borough, and to consider future planning and financial implications.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Note the recent changes that impact upon school places as detailed within this report.
- 2.2 Approve the measures required to manage the pressures in the short to medium term.
- 2.3 Approve the capital investment of circa £900k to build a new teaching block on Y Pant which can be funded from resources within the existing 3 year capital programme.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To continue to provide the appropriate number of school places in the right locations so as to deliver high quality education provision for learners in the South of the County Borough.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 School places in the South of the County Borough have been carefully monitored over the last few years due to the number of housing developments being constructed in the locality, creating pressure on the capacity of our schools in this area.
- 4.2 The Council has taken action previously to alleviate these pressures by amending catchment boundaries and by providing additional accommodation on our school sites to increase capacity.
- 4.3 The Council continues to proactively manage these pressures and invest in our schools through Band B of the 21st Century Schools and Colleges Programme. Projects in this area, include:
- the construction of five new primary schools delivered through the Mutual Investment Model (MIM);
 - constructing new teaching blocks and delivering new facilities for a Welsh medium 3-19 school delivered through MIM;
 - constructing two new teaching blocks for a secondary school; and
 - delivering a large extension to a primary school funded through an S106 agreement with a large housing developer.

In addition to these significant projects, the Council continues to ensure that our interests are protected through financial contributions from the CIL legislation in conjunction with the Planning Department.

- 4.4 The overarching objectives for the interventions listed above are to increase capacity in this part of the County Borough, as well as significantly improving the learning environments for all learners. In addition, we continue to scrutinise catchment areas in accordance with the growth in housing developments, and boundary amendments are constantly being appraised.
- 4.5 The projects listed at paragraph 4.3 build upon investment in this area already delivered as a part of Band A of the 21st Century Schools investment programme. In this area specifically, funding of £24.2M was invested in a new school for Y Pant. This project also delivered catchment changes to reduce the pressures on school places in Y Pant, providing the authority greater powers to effectively manage school places in this catchment area.
- 4.6 Despite these interventions, capacity pressures at Y Pant School have become increasingly problematic. The considerable increase in housing developments in this area, as well as parents/carers making informed decisions to rent and purchase homes in the catchment areas of one of our highest performing schools, has placed undue pressure on school places at the school.
- 4.7 These pressures have also been compounded through a recent catchment change made by the Vale of Glamorgan. The catchment area for Cowbridge

Comprehensive School has recently increased meaning that children who reside in RCT but attend out of county faith primary schools Llansannor and Pendoylan Church in Wales Primary Schools, will have more difficulty in being successfully awarded a place at their associated secondary school. This is down to the prioritisation criteria within the School Admissions Code which places these children in priority category 4 or 5, as they reside outside of the catchment area. The tangible impact of this catchment change is that 29 pupils currently attending out of county primary schools secured a place in Y Pant in September 2021, and already we have received a further 19 applications for September 2022. To confirm, these pupils live within RCT and within the catchment area of Y Pant School.

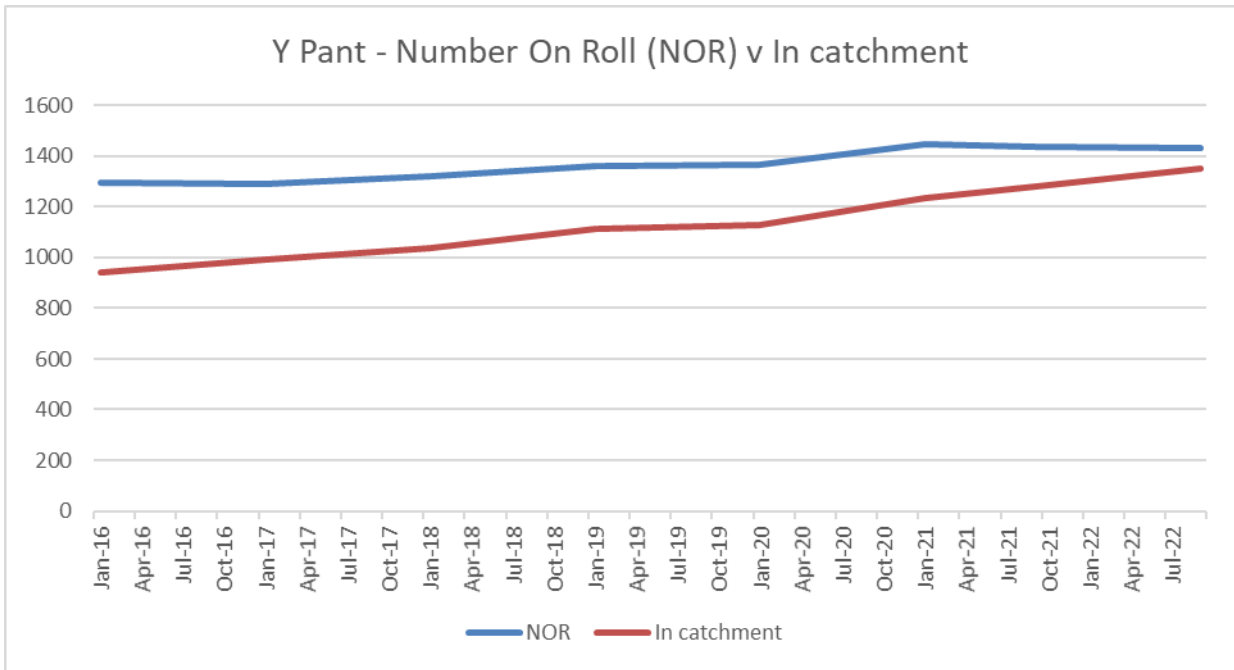
- 4.8 Pressures in this area are also being felt by Bridgend County Borough Council as they are experiencing capacity challenges in Pencoed Comprehensive School. A significant number of children from the Llanharan and Brynna area have traditionally attended Pencoed but, as capacity pressures in the school have increased, the number of successful applications of RCT pupils has significantly decreased in recent years which places even greater pressure on Y Pant.
- 4.9 The Admission Team have been working proactively with the schools in this area to ensure that out-of-catchment pupils attend their home school. If an application for a school place is unsuccessful then the parents/carers have the right to appeal that decision. As you can see from the table below, despite the best efforts of the Admissions Team, the Independent Appeals Panel uphold a significant number of appeals. In these circumstances, learners may well have exceptional and compelling social, emotional, medical or family reasons why a placement in Y Pant School is essential and should be agreed.

Table 1: Number of Admission Appeals

Year	Appeals held	Successful	Unsuccessful	Withdrawn
20/21	16	5	10	1
19/20	27	10	17	0
18/19	0	0	0	0
17/18	29	5	21	3
16/17	14	5	9	0
15/16	19	15	2	2
14/15	16	9	5	2
	121	49	64	8

- 4.10 Graph 1 provides a snapshot of the number of learners on roll plotted against the number of in-catchment learners. This highlights the positive impact of the work undertaken by the Admissions Team. The graph shows the gradual reduction in the number of out-of-catchment pupils and the number of in-catchment pupils attending Y Pant over the last 5 years. The projected trend indicates that the increased pressure on the school is primarily from in-catchment pupils.

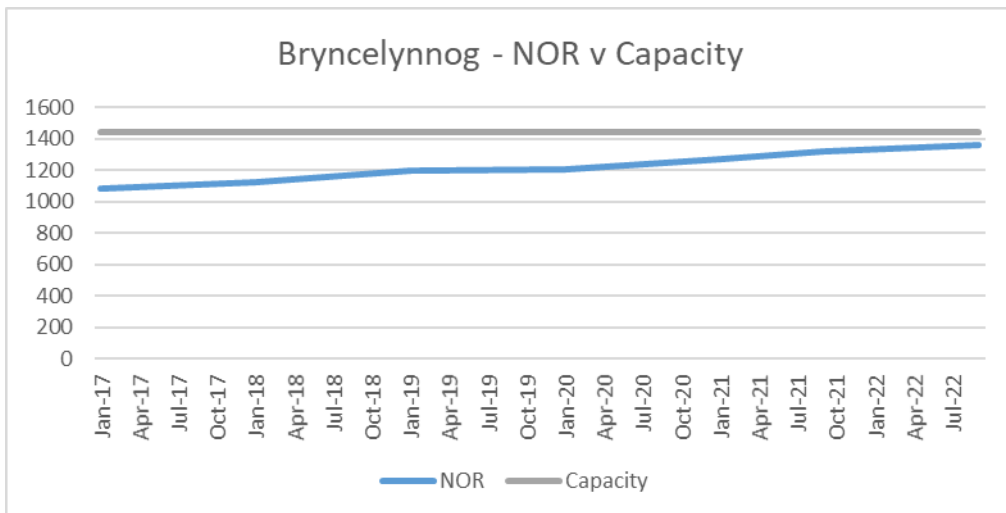
Graph 1: Y Pant Pupil Numbers



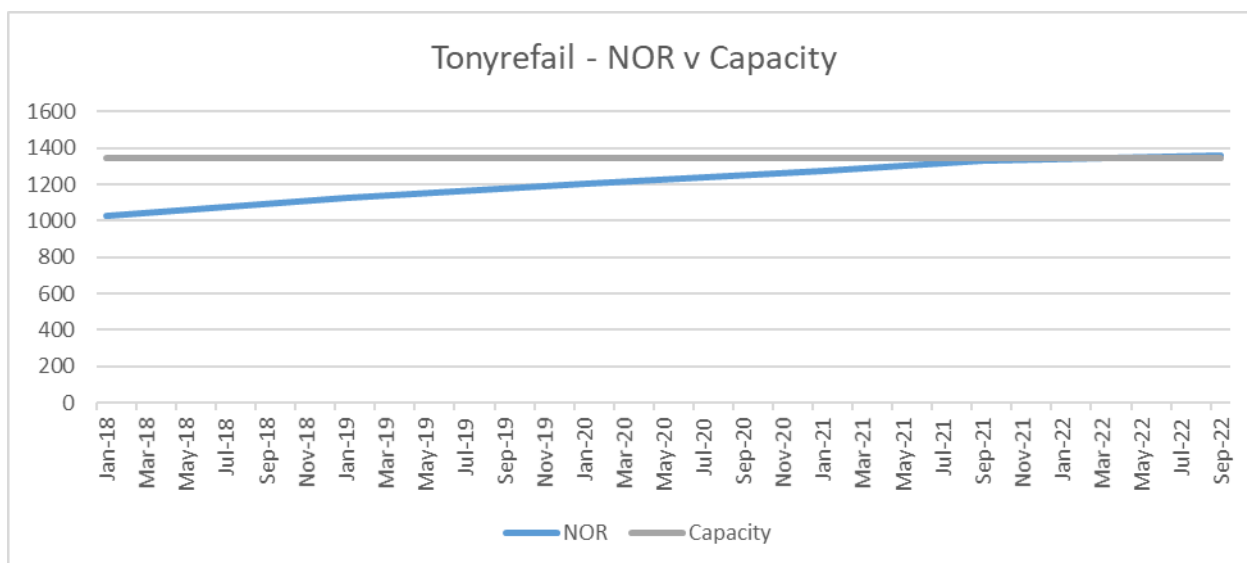
4.11 This data shows that in January 2016 there were 941 in-catchment pupils attending Y Pant. This number will increase to 1368 in September 2022. The admission number for Y Pant is 233, however the local authority had no option but to award places to 272 pupils this September. This takes the overall numbers on roll at the school to 1436 which is currently 34 places over their 1402 capacity.

4.12 The expansion of housing developments in the Taf-Ely Area is also impacting significantly on admissions in the wider area, including neighbouring secondary schools to Y Pant. This growth can be clearly seen in Graphs 2 and 3 below, depicting the growth in both Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School and Tonyrefail Community School.

Graph 2: Bryncelynnog Pupil Numbers



Graph 3: Tonyrefail Pupil Numbers



The data shows that in January 2017 there were 1088 pupils attending Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School. This number will increase to 1361 in September 2022. Similarly, the numbers on roll in Tonyrefail Community School have increased from 1029 when the new school was created in 2018, to 1362 in September 2022. The pressure of the demand in housing developments in the south of the County Borough is being increasingly felt by all schools affected.

- 4.13 Cabinet will be aware that the project to increase the capacity and significantly enhance the learning environment and teaching facilities at Bryncelynnog is progressing. This project will provide the school with 2 new teaching blocks providing additional provision to cater for anticipated growth in the area, as well as the sixth form students who will be transitioning from both Pontypridd High and Hawthorn High Schools.
- 4.14 Predicting the growth in pupil numbers at Y Pant has been very challenging given that the extent of proposed housing developments were not anticipated when the school was originally conceptualised. When Band A funding was secured for Y Pant in 2014, the Welsh Government did not permit the Council to build in considerable surplus capacity into the school. However, the Council was permitted to prudently add to the new building infrastructure in terms of providing additional facilities such as a larger hall, dining facilities, toilets, and play areas. This enabled the Council to future proof the school in terms of ancillary provision to accommodate additional classrooms should they be required to manage and cater for any emerging short-term pressure from housing developments in the catchment areas of the school. In light of this, steps now need to be taken to tackle this unprecedented growth in the numbers on roll to cater for this continued emerging demand.
- 4.15 Based on the current growth, compounded by the extensive new housing developments in the area, projections suggest that this trend will continue to increase. Approximately 170 dwellings were completed in the Llanharan, Llanharry

and Talbot Green/Pontyclun area in 2020-2021 within the Y Pant catchment. Major housing developments that are either underway or have a level of planning certainty, indicate that well over 100 units will be built a year up until 2024 in this area. With further sites on board, this is likely to increase to 200 units a year from 2025 up to 2030. If further housing allocations are to be identified in the catchment, in a future Development Plan; we are likely to see this level of growth (or more) per annum throughout the following decade. In view of this, it is proposed that a further 120 places be created within the school to meet local demand. This growth would meet the current short-term pressures but not account for pressures that may arise from any potential new housing developments identified under the emerging Local Development Plan. Potential future demand is likely to be significant and the Council will work in partnership with developers to ensure that the infrastructure in the local community adequately addresses this need. This will need to be robustly addressed in that part of the County Borough in the medium to long-term, and consideration given to building new schools to accommodate the potential future growth in the population.

- 4.16 An urgent solution is required to meet admission pressures in this area. There is a potential opportunity to increase the capacity at the school with relative ease, which would help alleviate pressures in the shorter term. Officers in Corporate Estates have advised that that a simple 4-classroom block can be constructed at the rear of the school site, subject to gaining the relevant statutory consents, at an estimated cost of £900k. It is also proposed that this block be designed and built to support the construction of another storey, at a later date, should demand for school places warrant this in the future. As such, the relevant statutory consents would be sought for a two-storey build to be constructed in two phases, this will future proof the capacity at Y Pant until a medium to long-term solution is found. This proposed expansion will create capacity for the short-term ensuring pupils within catchment can attend, thereby avoiding increased school admission appeals, higher school transport costs, increasing our carbon footprint and impacting on our pupils' wellbeing. Without the additional capacity the Council will face significant challenges in meeting its statutory duty for the sufficiency of school places.
- 4.17 If work were to commence shortly, and engagement with the relevant statutory authorities permitted to start, then this additional accommodation could potentially be put in place by the end of 2022. Given our current projections, these additional classrooms will provide the required accommodation at Y Pant for the next 4-5 years.
- 4.18 Officers will continue to work closely with Planning Department colleagues to ensure that all new housing development enquiries and applications are robustly scrutinised for the impact that they may have on our school places, and to ensure that appropriate measures are put in place. Further information and long-term options to manage this ongoing issue will be brought back to Cabinet for future consideration and approval if required.

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS/SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 5.1 The Council has to satisfy its public sector duties under the Equality Act 2010 (including specific Welsh public sector duties). Pursuant to these legal duties Councils must in making decisions, have due regard to the need to (1) eliminate

unlawful discrimination, (2) advance equality of opportunity and (3) foster good relations on the basis of protected characteristics.

- 5.2 All works carried out will be fully compliant with the Equality Act 2010 which will ensure that the new facilities are fully accessible.

6. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 A Welsh Impact Assessment is not required at this juncture. However, if further works are required which triggers a statutory school consultation, then an assessment will be required in accordance with the School Organisation Code (2018) as stated in paragraph 7.1 below.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 There are no formal consultation requirements arising from these proposals as the increase in pupil numbers are below the threshold required to trigger a statutory school organisation consultation. However, if Cabinet decide to proceed with any future options brought before them to build new schools, or significantly increase the capacity of schools, the Council will have to meet the requirements of the School Organisational Code and undertake the necessary statutory consultations.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 As referenced at Section 4, the cost associated with this proposal is estimated at £900k.
- 8.2 This cost can be funded from resources already set aside for school modernisation and to support the ongoing Band B 21st Century School programme into the medium term.

9. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S 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."
- 9.2 The proposals considered in the report contribute to all 7 wellbeing goals within the Future Generation (Wales) Act 2015 and due regard has been made to the Five Ways of Working, as contained within the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 Members will be aware of the rapid growth in housing along the M4 corridor in the south of the County Borough and the pressures that this puts on our school places. Members will also be aware of the Council's planned 21st Century Schools investment in a number of schools within this area to improve and increase our education provision in the long term.

- 10.2 The proposal to create additional teaching accommodation at Y Pant will alleviate the immediate pressure at this time and allow for a strategic approach to education provision to be developed over the next few years. This will coincide with the emerging Local Development Plan which is currently being developed. Officers from Education and Planning Policy will continue to work collaboratively on developing this strategic document which will help manage these pressures in the long term.
- 10.3 It is recommended therefore that Members agree to construct additional teaching accommodation at Y Pant and agree to receive further reports should further changes to capacity and catchment boundaries be required. We continue to strive to provide the best possible learning experiences in the best possible learning environments for the children of RCT.