

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 31ST OCTOBER, 2016

REFERENCE FROM LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
3RD OCTOBER, 2016

“ PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH NEW MIXED SEX SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BARRY (REF) –

Cabinet had, on 4th July, 2016, referred the report to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration. The Chairman had subsequently agreed that an Extraordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee be held to consider the report during the consultation period in order to afford opportunities for members of the public, key stakeholders including Trade Union representatives, Governors from the schools involved and Governors of feeder schools to be invited to attend to make representations if they wished to do so. Committee was also advised that extensive publicity for the meeting had been undertaken including a press release in local papers, publication on the Council’s website and social media. It was noted that no requests to speak had been received to date.

The report provided the background to the proposals, outlining that following consideration of responses to a previous consultation, the Cabinet had decided at its meeting on 5th October, 2015 to establish an Advisory Board to review options, with particular regard to the option of establishing two mixed sex English medium secondary schools as well as addressing the need to expand Welsh medium secondary school places.

Having considered feedback from engagement activity carried out with the public, pupils, staff and Governors of Barry and Bryn Hafren Comprehensive Schools and Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Morgannwg, the Board had considered options for the future of the three schools and had agreed the preferred options as detailed below:

- (i) Expand Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Morgannwg on its current site with the provision of new entrance from Port Road;
- (ii) Build a new 11-18 mixed sex school on the site of Barry Comprehensive School;
- (iii) Create a modern 11-18 mixed sex school by refurbishing and modernising the Bryn Hafren site with the provision of some new facilities.

The Interim Director in presenting the report informed the Committee that there were a number of drivers for transforming the current single sex English medium secondary school provision in Barry which were detailed within the report and covered the topics of surplus places, condition of school buildings and school

standards. The Council had also engaged with local children, students, parents, staff and Governors on a number of occasions through formal consultation and through recent engagement activity to inform the work of the Advisory Board. The report had also considered the future learning environment, Post 16 provision, support for learners with Additional Learning Needs, community facilities, leadership, transition and the statutory process that must be followed if the proposal was to be approved by Cabinet.

A copy of the consultation document on the proposals had been sent to a number of groups including all Elected Members of the Vale Council following the decision on 4th July 2016 to consult on the proposal to transform English medium secondary education in Barry by establishing two new mixed sex schools. Further copies were available at the meeting if required.

The timetable for the statutory process outlined that following the consultation which had commenced on 5th September to 17th October, 2016 a further report would be prepared for submission to Cabinet by 12th December, 2016. The statutory notice period, subject to the decision of Cabinet, would be 3rd January, 2017 to 31st January, 2017, with any objection report being submitted to Cabinet by 6th March, 2017 and the decision notification the 9th March, 2017.

During the discussion Members questions centred around the proposed catchment areas, the establishment of two separate Governing Bodies, the transition period, the impact of building work, potential gains for pupils, the establishment of a centre of excellence and financial resources.

Some Members referred to recent discussions with constituents in relation to the new catchment areas and the potential for an imbalance relating to the number of pupils entitled to free school meals in each school. The Interim Director for Learning and Skills advised that a significant amount of work had been undertaken to date with the Department seeking to ensure that there were the right numbers of pupils in the catchment area for the schools. Pupil data had been analysed in some depth with the proposals based on current pupils. On this basis the difference in the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals between the two proposed schools was 7%. However, it was important to point out that the Department could not be sure which school pupils would attend in the future.

However, of note was the fact that it was possible that many children would choose to apply for admission to the schools they were currently attending.

In response to a query regarding the arrangements for Governing Bodies, the Interim Director confirmed that the two “new” schools would require the establishment of two new Governing Bodies. Should the Council’s Cabinet approve the proposals one of the first tasks for the department would be to create new temporary Governing Bodies which would become permanent when the schools were established. Members were advised that there was no intention to dismiss any staff and no new contracts would need to be signed, although the Governing Bodies may provide / consider going out to external advert for the Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher

positions if they wish to do so. The Advisory Board had also sought to reassure staff that the new schools would be dependent on current staffing as the Council's main aim was to encourage continuity. To this end, the Department had met with staff in the schools in consultation sessions to discuss the issues and concerns. Although noting that this was the advice provided by the Department, a Member stated that the new Governing Bodies could decide to do something different, which would be within their remit to do so.

Following a query as to the appointment of Governors to the schools, the Interim Director advised that the positions would be advertised within current procedures and practices and if indeed necessary temporary appointments could be made to parental Governor positions even though the pupils may not, at that stage, be present.

Councillor Burnett, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Education, reminded the Committee that the proposals were a second set of proposals referring to the fact that the first set had been rejected as a way forward. Although it was accepted there would be challenges ahead, the Advisory Group would continue to work with the two schools to ensure the best outcomes possible, particularly in terms of catchment etc. The Interim Director further stated that, having considered the data, it had become apparent that the demographic profile of Barry had changed, particularly with the new housing developments that had taken place.

A Member queried the views of Welsh Government in terms of funding for the proposals with the Interim Director responding that Welsh Government was a consultee to the proposals, but no feedback had been received as yet. Estyn, another consultee, would also review the impact of the proposals on pupil attainment as to whether it would improve or stay the same with such comments being influential in any decisions made. Of note was the fact that the Department rarely received a Welsh Government response on any proposals put forward until a business case for funding had been presented.

Following a query in relation to the impact that the reduction of pupil numbers from the Cadoc Ward to Sully area may have on the proposals the Interim Director advised that at this stage she could not give any reassurances in relation to the impact as it was also apparent that a number of Barry pupils went to St. Cyres, Stanwell and St. Richard Gwyn. Although she could confirm that it was apparent that a number of parents had requested mixed sex education in Barry. There being no evidence that most parents would send their children to other schools during the transitional process, the Department would endeavour to limit the impact of the proposals on pupils, particularly those sitting exams in the first year as they would remain in their current year group with the same teaching staff.

With regard to the impact of building work, Members were reassured that the Council was experienced in handling such disruption and good practice and lessons learned from other schemes would be used in executing the proposals. Major building work would also be scheduled to be undertaken during school holidays.

In response to a concern as to the proposals having an adverse impact on pupils' results, no current projections had been made in respect of this. In referring to the proposals for a Centre of Behavioural Excellence, the Head of Service for Achievement for All advised of forthcoming changes to legislation in relation to Pupil Referral Units (PRU) advising that Welsh Government was advocating that such centres would be better run by the schools themselves. The proposals would seek to develop outreach services and concentrate on maintaining placements in mainstream schools. These issues would be addressed once the direction which Welsh Government wished the Council to take and the options afforded were presented.

The Cabinet Member made reference to the fact that the Council needed to move towards the acceptance that young people have challenges at a number of stages in their lives, with some support only being required for example for short periods i.e. six months. The intention was to move away from the practice of people being sent to a PRU and never coming out again, with the aim to develop a Centre of Excellence with an opportunity to develop good provision for young people. As to its name and how it would work etc., this was a work in progress.

In comparing the current PRU to the new Centre of Excellence, the Head of Service stated that it was similar in size, although the majority of placements currently at the PRU were full time. The aim would be to emphasise the service as an early intervention centre which would be used for teachers to build on their skills. In referring to the overall figure of £32m, it was noted that this included the cost of the PRU.

The Co-Opted Member for the Secondary Sector queried whether the choice of Post 16 subjects at Barry and Bryn Hafren would be down to the staff and whether students would be able to move freely in each school to avoid travelling. The Interim Director stated that students in the schools currently travelled and for the future this would depend upon the subjects they needed to study. Once the Senior Leadership Team and the Governing Bodies were established, further discussion on the subjects to be provided would take place.

The Chairman stated that the proposals referred to investment on both sites and identified new sports facilities with the intention, the Interim Director advised, to encourage all schools to be community focused schools, which the Welsh Government officials had advised they would consider when assessing the proposals for funding.

Members recognised that the proposals seemed less controversial than the previous proposals. The Operational Manager for Strategy and Resources referred to the 174 responses from pupils and members of the community which were 70% in favour of the new proposals. The current feedback to date consisted of concerns in relation to catchment, transition and how the mixed sex schools were going to work in practice. It was apparent that stakeholders had been quite positive and constructive in their feedback.

In conclusion, the Chairman took the opportunity to advise Members of the schools surplus places review that had been undertaken by Members of the Committee sometime previously which had supported a move to mixed sex education in Barry. The Chairman also reminded Members that the consultation period remained open on the proposals presented until 17th October 2016 should they wish to make separate responses.

Having fully considered the report and following responses provided to questions at the meeting it was subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T Cabinet be advised that the Scrutiny Committee concurred with the current option proposed and urge progress in respect of the matter.

Reason for recommendation

In recognition of the discussions at the meeting and the proposals contained within the report.”