

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 4TH MARCH 2019

REFERENCE FROM LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
12TH FEBRUARY, 2019

“ PROPOSALS TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF PRIMARY WELSH
MEDIUM SCHOOL PLACES IN BARRY (REF) –

Cabinet had, at its meeting on 17th December, 2018, referred the report to the Scrutiny Committee as part of the consultation process. The report was seeking approval to consult on a proposal to move Ysgol Sant Baruc from its current location on St. Paul's Avenue in Barry to a newly constructed 420 place school building with 96 part time nursery places on the Barry Waterfront development.

The Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources, in presenting the report, drew attention to paragraph 35 advising that since 1998 the Barry area had seen a 5.8% decline in the demand for English medium education and an increased demand for Welsh medium education of 6.7%.

Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers was published in July 2017, and set out the long-term vision for the Welsh language. Increasing the number of Welsh speakers was one of the three key themes, and the following key transformational changes would be required within the education sector in order to achieve the vision:

- Increase the proportion of each school year group receiving Welsh-medium education from 22% (based on 7,700 seven-year-old learners in 2015/16) to 30% (about 10,500 in each year group) by 2031, and then 40% (about 14,000 in each year group) by 2050;
- Transform how the Council taught Welsh to all learners in order that by 2050 at least 70% of those learners reported that they could speak Welsh by the time they left school;
- Increase the number of primary teachers who could teach in Welsh from 2,900 to 3,900 by 2031 and 5,200 by 2050; increase the number of secondary teachers who could teach Welsh from 500 to 900 by 2031 and 1,200 by 2050; and increase the number of secondary teachers who could teach through the medium of Welsh from 1,800 to 3,200 by 2031 and 4,200 by 2050.

It was noted that approximately 1,700 dwellings would be built by 2022. 756 units in total had been built and occupied to date with children placed at schools serving the area. The Barry Waterfront Development currently served High Street and Holton Primary Schools for English medium primary provision, Ysgol Sant Baruc for Welsh medium provision and All Saints and St. Helen's Primary Schools for denominational education.

Having regard to paragraph 74 of the report, the Head of Service referred to a typo in that the report noted the estimated revenue cost of operating a new 420 place school would be £1.43m. This should have read £1.33m. It was noted that the difference from the revenue budget for Ysgol Sant Baruc of £760k to the £1.33m would be found from within individual schools' budgets generated by the additional revenue from the increase in pupil numbers from the new housing developments.

The Project Manager for the 21st Century Schools, Mr. Matthew Curtis, was introduced to the Committee and in referring to Appendix A, the proposed timetable for increasing the number of primary Welsh medium school places in Barry, advised that the consultation period would end on 22nd February, 2019 and had been undertaken in line with the School Organisational Code. To date it had also been published on the Council's website and a decent response rate had been received. To assist the consultation process a number of public sessions had been held (around 20) with comments being received, for example around funding, travel and hiring implications. The Project Manager advised that a large percentage of those consulted were in favour of the proposals, with positive responses having been received.

Following the presentation of the report, the Chairman then asked the first speaker, Mr. G. Griffiths, to make his representations to the Committee.

Mr. Griffiths advised that he was an Local Authority Governor of Ysgol Sant Curig and Ysgol Gwaun y Nant schools, but that he was speaking in a personal capacity to the Committee. Mr. Griffiths stated that he would be making personal comments / observations based on research he had carried out and listening to fellow Governors at recent meetings. He stated that he was sure that in due course there would be formal representations made by each Board of Governors in respect of the proposal. Mr. Griffiths advised that he was a former Bilingual Qualified Teacher and as such knew the challenges that Bilingual Schools faced in predominately English speaking parts of Wales.

Mr. Griffiths stated that Towns and Cities were a collection of Urban Villages and each was different and needed different facilities to help them survive and grow.

There seemed he stated, in his view, two issues to consider:

Numbers attracted to each school. Sant Baruc 234 / Sant Curig 425 / Gwaun y Nant 252

"New Schools attract new Pupils Sant Baruc will be moving to the Waterfront so no issue there – but could Sant Curig and Gwaun y Nant see a significant drop in numbers at a time when ALAN / new Curriculum are in training and could this see staff wishing to move to a New School.

Schools look to promote themselves and social media has become key in this. If you Google each school there are up to nine different sites where Parents / Guardians can get information. Who is responsible for those sites – updating them and / or passing on relevant information to sites which are not School or Vale of Glamorgan?"

Mr. M. Bowen, the second member of the public who had registered to speak, was then invited by the Chairman to make his representations.

Mr. Bowen explained that he was a parent of a child at Ysgol Sant Baruc, but was not a Governor of the school. He was also involved in one of the forums for parents centred around the Waterfront development and had also wished to provide the Committee with the local RhaG perspective and support of the proposals, advising that they were good proposals both for Sant Curig and Sant Baruc. He was also confident for the future, being aware that a number of parents were supporting Welsh medium education and the proposal would assist the target for 2050 of increasing Welsh medium by a third. If the proposal went ahead he advised there would be a 17% increase for Barry and 10% for the Vale of Glamorgan. Mr. Bowen also referred to the lack of catering facilities at Sant Baruc and that having this facility would be a significant advantage for the school.

With regard to paragraph 49 of the report, he advised that for the Reception year the school was full and in his view, there was so much demand that this statistic was only going to grow.

Councillor S. Wiliam, not a Member of the Committee but with permission to speak, advised that he was a local Member and referred to two major benefits of the proposals, the access to Welsh medium education in the locality and to community benefits. The support in the area he stated was extensive and that all the people he had talked to were pleased with the proposals. There was also an excellent English medium school on the Island and that the proposals would be future proofing the Vale in moving to further promote the Welsh language throughout the county.

Councillor Dr. I. Johnson, not a Member of the Committee but with permission to speak, stated that he was a Local Authority Governor of Gladstone Primary. He took the opportunity to thank the officers for hosting the meetings for Local Ward Members the previous week and trusted that this would continue through to the planning process. He was aware through the consultation that 90% had responded in favour of the proposals and this was something he said was to be extremely welcomed. As local Member he was aware of the constraints of the current site, there being no parking facilities and that it was not a good situation for staff, pupils, parents or residents.

Mr. Gapper, the Welsh Medium Education Representative on the Scrutiny Committee, stated that in representing the Welsh Medium sector he thought the case for expanding and relocating had been well made by the previous speakers and, in his view, the report had provided an excellent rationale for the proposal and he thanked the officers for the information provided. Mr. Gapper also considered that there was a high level of support for the proposal and took the opportunity to refer to two specific points. Aware of the developing issue in relation to Welsh medium education, he considered that the rate of increase was likely to increase further in the future and with the 2050 policy this would lead to a greater demand for Welsh medium education in the future. Secondly, although it was necessary to respond to the demand it was also not just a numbers game, the benefits were clear and he considered that the Welsh medium education proposal would achieve such benefits.

Having heard the speakers, the Chairman then referred the representations and the report for consideration by the Scrutiny Committee.

A number of Members considered that the proposals appeared to be well thought out and the arguments by the speakers who had spoken clearly shaped the way forward. A Member also queried whether there was geographical data available for the breakdown of responses and was informed that although there was no specific geographical data, the information could be broken down in respect of the type of respondent i.e. parent, local resident, etc. Reference was also made to the need to ensure the continuity between further education and officers were urged to consider such matters.

Following a query as to how the proposal had been reached in the first instance, the Head of Service for Strategy, Community Learning and Resources in response advised that there had been a number of historical discussions that had taken place. He also referred to the conditions in the schools, in particular Sant Baruc did not have a kitchen and staff time was taken up in taking children back and forth over two sites. The point had also been made in relation to the need to ensure Welsh medium education was supported and the rationale to offer choice. There was already existing capacity in High Street and Barry Island Schools and in referring to further education advised that opportunities in order to support families within the communities was one of the drivers in promoting the proposal.

Councillor Hodges, the Vice-Chairman of the Committee, stated that he had heard nothing but praise and excitement from the people on the Waterfront about the proposals and he was also aware that organisations within the community were also keen to use the facilities in the school.

The Youth Forum Representative stated that in his view, the proposal was an amazing opportunity and that through his school years he had seen the provision of the Welsh language change and he asked whether all Members on the Committee agreed with the proposal in order that he could inform the new Welsh Parliament Forum Member who attended Bro Morgannwg School.

The Chairman also advised that she was hugely supportive of the steps that had been taken to promote and encourage the Welsh language but took issue with some of the figures contained within the report and, in her view, using percentages was also strictly not comparing like with like. She also queried the information in relation surplus places, advising that the report needed to be accurate in order for Committee Members to make informed decisions. She also took the opportunity to ask the Committee to consider making a recommendation to Cabinet for a strategic review of all schools in the Vale as, in her view, there were a number of Victorian Schools which required refurbishment and that these should not be overlooked. Her main focus was to ensure equity in provision across the primary sector.

Members, although concurring with the sentiments of the Chairman, felt that a further report could be presented to the Scrutiny Committee under its work programme in relation to a review of school buildings.

The Cabinet Member, with permission to speak, took the opportunity to reassure the Committee that in preparing the proposals he had been extremely mindful of the need to ensure that Welsh medium provision was not introduced at the expense of English medium provision.

Having fully considered the report, it was subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T Cabinet be informed that the Scrutiny Committee unanimously supports the proposal to increase the number of primary Welsh medium schools places in Barry as contained within the report.

(2) T H A T a further report on school buildings in the primary sector be presented to the Scrutiny Committee under its work programme.

Reasons for recommendations

(1) Having considered the report and in view of the overwhelming support for the proposal.

(2) In order that the Committee can consider primary provision of school buildings and their fabric.”